

A WOMEN'S LIBERATION MAGAZINE MARCH 1977 ISSUE 56

30 PENCE

spare Rib

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**Simone
de Beauvoir
Interviewed**

**"It's Colditz or
the concrete
jungle"
Taking on
Liverpool
Council**



GMWU moves to improve equal pay legislation

The GMWU is to put forward two resolutions at the TUC's Women's Conference at Weymouth on March 10th and 11th.

The resolution concerning Equal Pay seeks TUC support for the following changes in legislation:

- ★ give independent trade unions the right to reject a job evaluation scheme and require an employer to negotiate a jointly agreed scheme;
- ★ give independent trade unions the right to present a claim for equal pay to a tribunal in its own name on behalf of members;
- ★ test cases should be allowed without the necessity for employer agreement;
- ★ at the very least, the lowest male rate should be paid to all female workers;
- ★ lay members of Industrial Tribunals should be entitled to become chairmen in place of a lawyer after two years' service on tribunals.

The second GMWU resolution attacks racial discrimination and recognises the vulnerability of many immigrant women who are often isolated by language problems as well as social customs. It asks Conference to:

- ★ call on all women workers to pay particular attention to the plight of immigrant women, whether as fellow workers or as neighbours in order to assist their economic and social integration;
- ★ urges the negotiation of the TUC's Equal Opportunity Clause in all workplace agreements; and
- ★ urges the formation of Equal Opportunity Committees at the workplace to monitor and fight against both sex and racial discrimination.



General and Municipal Workers Union, Thorne House, Claygate, Esher, Surrey KT10 0TL. Tel Esher 62081

The TASS Guide to What They Say. Number Three

The Employer who Gripes about Children says



“But if I extend your maternity leave everyone will want the same”

Women are entitled to short maternity leave. And you can have a job back after your baby is born. The Employment Protection Act says so. But it's still not enough. Anyway, your boss could be one of those who says he has never heard of it. So what can you do about it?

They said battle on. Alone.

Or you can join us in TASS. We know what we are doing. We are the union for all staff in engineering. Our women's membership is growing faster than any other staff union. Our policy is simple.

Our members are worth much more than the basic minimum given

by the law. And our unrivalled negotiating record shows we mean business.

If you want the benefit of our strength, experience and expertise contact Judith Hunt, our National Women's Organiser. Or why not have a chat with your local TASS representative.

tass

Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers
Technical Administrative and Supervisory Section
Head Office:
Onslow Hall, Little Green, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1QH
Telephone 01-948 2271



News vendor in Dublin

Spare Rib has been banned in the Republic of Ireland for being "usually or frequently indecent or obscene". The Censorship Board based their decision on four issues, which included information on abortion, masturbation and self-examination for breast cancer. Obscene?? So if you know any Irish sisters, mail them copies and beat the censors.

Cover

Maud Price, June Moore and Maria O'Reilly, members of the Netherley Flatdwellers Action Group, Liverpool. Photographed by Laurence Sparham (IFL)

Spare Rib is produced collectively by Rose Ades, Anny Brackx, Alison Fell, Victoria Green, Sue Hobbs, Gabriel Mills, Jane Prince, Linda Phillips, Laura Margolis, Jill Nicholls, Rozsika Parker, Michele Roberts, Eleanor Stephens.

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Why Bother . . .

★ Dear *Spare Rib*,

I was interested to read the article on employment agencies, and I look forward to the next one, on temps — as I have for several months, had the dubious pleasure of working for 'Crook Street'.

As a newly qualified and unemployed teacher, desperately scraping around for temporary work, I was driven back to the agencies time and time again, finally becoming lodged in 'Crook Street'. I was sub-contracted out to a local large and successful company, one renowned for its top level and competitive salaries. Although the work I was given was seldom different to that of regular employees, I received nowhere near the appropriate wage for the job, since, as you say, the agency claws in 42% of one's money. I ended up, after a 37-40 hour week, with an amount little more than dole money. However, being brought up to be independent and somewhat industrious, I preferred to be occupied, in spite of the excruciating boredom and unimaginative environment.

But I became increasingly irritated by the attitude and behaviour of regular employees towards 'temps' — especially the men, who seem to regard them as glorified handmaidens. I finally, literally, walked out, after being treated like a doormat by a junior male clerk. The agency, which up to then, had always preserved its flawless facade for me, always Smiling and Helpful and Caring, did an about-face and clung to its client, the company. As it admitted to me — 'the client is always right — you, as a temp, are always wrong.' When it comes to a choice between being servile and being unemployed — well, there is no choice, it's a duty to one's self-respect as a person, and to one's sex as a woman, to say — enough.

For me this is a passing experience, since office work is not my choice, but there must be many for whom it is a long term choice to be a 'temp' and who have no defences or rights to call upon.

If there are any last remaining corners of female exploitation (what corners? Acres) the 'temp' system is one — and since most agencies are staffed by women the insult is a double one.

Keep printing,
Yours,
Jenny N.,
Hampshire.

Proud To Fight The SWP Way

★ Dear *Spare Rib*,

I feel I really must write in protest at the crude sectarianism

of Celia Holt (Issue no. 54) in her letter on the question of a Woman's Right To Work.

Firstly, the slogan of a 'Woman's Right To Work' did not originate with student occupations of last summer or with the IMG. 'The equal right of all women to a job' is and has been from the start one of the demands of the Right To Work Campaign which the International Socialists have always campaigned for and worked intimately with — Ms Holt does not even once mention the Right To Work Campaign.

The sister does not state whether or not she is a member of the IMG. If she is not, I should hate to think that in the future she might join them on the basis of such serious misapprehension of the politics of both IS (SWP) and the IMG. Therefore as a (proud) member of the Socialist Workers Party (then IS), I feel I must go some way towards enlightening her.

She says that 'IS does not support the autonomous organisation of women' and that therefore they regard such things as women's banners on demonstrations as 'divisive'. Her statement is illogical and incorrect. I can only assume that she is referring to the Right To Work March from London to Brighton in the summer last year when a democratic decision was taken by *all* the marchers who included men, women, members of various political groups — IS, IMG, CP, Labour Party etc and individuals of no particular affiliation, that only RTW banners should go on the march. It was a positive decision based on the particular nature of the march — note that it was a *march* not a demonstration — and not directed against women's groups or anything else so sinister.

Her comment that 'no left group is very advanced in its understanding of women's oppression' is particularly naive. It has been the case in various periods throughout history and is so today that revolutionary socialists have a *better* understanding of women's oppression than many other people precisely

Men's Talk

Dear *Spare Rib*,

Just an interesting little conversation overheard on a train from Woking recently.

1st man — I like to read the paper before my wife gets hold of it. She never folds it properly along the creases.

2nd man (smiles in sympathy) — Yes, mine's the same. Women just can't fold newspapers, that's all. (Mutual laughter)

Silence.

1st man — Tells you in here how to make your own bread.

2nd man — Well, it's simple enough.

1st man — Oh yes, quite simple, even for a woman.

2nd man — No skill required at all, really.

Yours truly,
J Meyer, Portsmouth.

Correction

The reply to *Fighting Menopausal Symptoms* (SR 53) was

because they see it within the context of capitalism and the class struggle. For this reason the Socialist Workers Party believe that women can never be free under capitalism but only under socialism and that the socialist revolution can only be carried through by working class men and women led by the revolutionary party of that class and not by an amorphous, ill-organised and ill-defined 'women's movement' which has no class base and never can have that base. This does not mean however as Celia Holt seems to think, that we say that women must not organise as women. On the contrary, we see it as vital.

Margaret Renn, women's organiser of the SWP emphasises this in the editorial of *Women's Voice* No. 1 (1977) I would like to end with a quote from that:

"Can man be free, if woman be a slave?" The answer is simply, No. There will be no socialism as long as women are considered unequal. And no organisation is really socialist so long as women are patronised, so long as they are left to see themselves as second class. *The only people who can do anything to change that are women themselves.* (My emphasis). That's what our paper is for. To build up our own confidence, to pool our experiences, to show each other how to fight so that we can organise a more effective battle for women's rights and for a socialist society". I apologise for the length of this letter but I hope you will print it because I think it is important that your readers do not, through *Spare Rib*, suffer the same misapprehensions about the Socialist Workers Party (IS) as Celia Holt.

With comradely greetings,
Mary Ann Stuart,
SWP, Manchester.

Women Only Rash

Dear *Spare Rib*

I find the recent rash of 'women only' events very disturbing, largely because they seem to me to be completely against the spirit of the movement.

It does not in any way make

our struggle easier if we go out of our way to alienate men, particularly those who are potentially on our side. It seems especially wrong in the case of benefit concerts and dances to exclude anyone who might be prepared to contribute to the cause in question, as this happened a few times recently.

What seems to me particularly bad is the deliberate failure to tell artists appearing at such events that men (including their own menfolk) are to be excluded. Presumably those organising the events believe that they are doing the right thing, but don't have the courage of their convictions to a sufficient extent to risk losing the performers. Perhaps they're afraid that a refusal to appear might be the price of honesty.

I've been with one particular woman singer on three occasions when she has discovered only two or three days before an event that men were not to be allowed in. She discovered this, what's more, only from magazine adverts, and was very upset, because she disapproves of this sort of sexism, but felt she had to appear, as she had already agreed to do so. On none of these occasions had the organisers of the event bothered to inform her of this restriction. This situation becomes even more ridiculous when a performer sings (as this woman does) feminist songs written by men, and when those very men are forbidden entry to the event where their songs are being sung.

We'll never win this battle for equality if we do our best to turn men against us, and we'll certainly never win it by the kind of blatant dishonesty practised by the organisers of those events. In sisterhood,
Sheila Miller,
London W14.

Selling Out?

Dear *Spare Rib*,

In January *Spare Rib* you report that two women are employed under the Job Creation Scheme as Administrator and Research Assistant with the Glasgow Women's Liberation group. You encourage other groups to do the same. We felt pretty uneasy when we first heard about this and after some discussion we are really appalled at the implications.

1. The Women's Liberation Movement has evolved principles of democracy and self-reliance which come directly from our own experiences. As women together talking about our lives we saw how our bodies and minds had been controlled by patriarchal "experts" and that our free-



Sorry everybody!
 8:00 PM - 11:30 PM
 on Fri 24 Feb
 will now be at
Ladbroke House
 Highbury Grove, N.W.10
 as advertised last issue
OUR NEXT by [illegible]
 will be at
 Ladbroke House
 on [illegible]
 8:00 PM - 11:30 PM

dom lies in becoming our own experts. Since it was control and manipulation which got us into this mess in the first place we decided to avoid a repeat performance within our own movement — therefore no leaders.

However nominal these new job titles may be, the fact that some women are being paid to be feminists makes it that much easier for the rest of us to sit back and let them do all the work (and consequently to put them in a position of acquiring skills and knowledge which we should all be fighting for). Our Liberation is contained as much in the process of struggle as in the outcome of that struggle. (We want to emphasise here that we have no doubt of Cathy and Wendy's good intentions. We know they are committed feminists.)

2 Hasn't it occurred to anyone to question why the system we are fighting should actually pay women to work for women's liberation? It either means that our activities are no threat whatever or else it is an attempt to subvert the Movement. It may be a combination of both. We've already pointed out how it introduces the patriarchal cult of the expert and subverts the democratic/anarchic nature of the Movement. It is also an excellent way of keeping tabs on what is happening within the Women's Movement. Presumably the employer expects reports on the activities of the employees and can dictate what the employees are actually entitled to do.

Why are men paying us to liberate ourselves?
 In sisterhood,
 Paula Jennings,
 Maureen Watson,
 Oxford

No More Yucky Ads

Dear Spare Rib,
 YUK is all I can say to the advert in the 'personal' column of the January issue — 'Lesbian femme 29 seeks friendship...'

What, is Spare Rib now being used as a vehicle for maintaining just those stereo-types we are trying to dispel? Rather than print this advert I'd suggest you wrote back questioning this woman's self-image (as femme).

Presumably she wanted a 'butch' to reply — well, there

are a lot more butchmen than butchlesbians around, and if she wants to be objectified and dominated by the butch 'ethic' then it would be easier to try the real thing! Surely we choose women as our lovers because they are women not because they are male substitutes?

Please don't print any more adverts like this.
 In sisterhood,
 Teresa Savage,
 London W13.

Something Completely Different...

Dear Spare Rib,
 Celia Berridge in her letter in December issue infers that children of married couples have to take their father's name — "We are acutely aware of the patriarchalism behind the naming of our children."

This is not the case — a child may be registered in whatever name the parents choose. The mother's name, the father's name, both names or a completely different name!
 Best wishes,
 Mary Ireland,
 London SE6.

Using Psychoanalytic Theory

Dear Spare Rib,
 Michelene Wandor and Margot Waddell's comment on Laura Mulvey's article and Mary Kelly's exhibition would be more of 'a contribution to a debate' had any of their points been argued. Instead, they present us with a series of assertions which we need to question and clarify in order to even begin discussion. In doing so we leave to one side two points that they raise. First, their speculations about Mary Kelly's 'intentions': only Mary Kelly can tell us about those. Secondly, their claims about the exhibition's 'difficulty' and 'obscurity' for the visitor: any exhibition, *Post Partum Document* included, will meet with a mixed response and to construct a single general response seems an unnecessary and unilluminating enterprise. There are however, other more concrete questions.

(a) One of the strengths of Laura Mulvey's article is that it treats the exhibition as a pro-

duct of artistic practice. This dimension is entirely missing from Margot and Michelene's comments. What is also missing, therefore, is any indication of how they understand the relationship between the work of an artist and the theoretical position which informs that work. The relationship is by no means a simple one. Mary Kelly's exhibition exposes, rather than suppresses, the difficulties involved.

(b) Their account of her work consequently reduces it to a question of the 'issues' involved, simply and somewhat blandly described as 'the mutual mother-child socialisation process in infancy': a sociological categorisation which which misses an important point. Mary Kelly's work is original in that it deconstructs the assumed unity of the mother-child relation in order to give a place to the mother's phantasies of possession and loss. She links the exploration of the psychic forces involved to the social relation in order to indicate the way in which motherhood is a constructed meaning rather than a biological truism. But in her account this deconstruction is achieved through the work of uncovering the interplay of unconscious desire with the conscious activity and physical and mental labour demanded by childcare. This aspect is not even mentioned by Michelene and Margot.

(c) This brings us to the question of the 'relatively new area of psychoanalysis' — 'new' for the women's movement or 'new' within psychoanalysis? Two points can be made here. First, Margot and Michelene seem to see such a new position as an already constituted body of knowledge which people already have or do not have: 'the viewer must bring the psychoanalytic/linguistic knowledge with her, or make use of the folder. They advise the artist against the 'exposure of ignorance' which may arouse anger and the philistine response. But what is wrong with

the exposure of ignorance, or indeed the exposure of the need for further work? It may cause discomfort, but might also be productive. And of course, the work *did* provoke a philistine response, 'a load of crap', unsurprisingly, since at a certain level that was what part of the exhibition literally was. Margot and Michelene make a connection between philistinism and anti-theoreticism, but then fail to explain why they think that Mary Kelly should have adopted a conciliatory stance. After all, it is not the work which 'depoliticises' the issues, but the response which, political in its own way, attempts to reduce the work to the level of sensational eccentricity. Their position appears to be one which evades the reality and consequences of ideological struggle.

(d) Perhaps Margot and Michelene could be more explicit about what they mean by 'a confusion about the nature of psychoanalysis'. Psychoanalytic theory is used to structure the exhibition but this contains no overtones of a 'clinical process'. It is not a psychoanalysis of Mary Kelly or her child. Laura Mulvey writing about Allen Jones in *Spare Rib* has shown how fruitful a psychoanalytic approach can be — there again with no question of psychoanalysing Allen Jones. The attempts to use the theory produce problems, but its use is important in that it emphasises the ideological positioning of women and explores the phantasy of the loss of the phallus: in *Post Partum Document* in the centrally important figure of the mother. If there is to be a debate it would be useful to know what specific importance Margot and Michelene attach to the movement towards the use of psychoanalytic theory as a means of exposing the mechanisms through which we are formed as women within patriarchy. Parveen Adams, Rosalind Delmar, Sue Lipshitz.

Simone de Beauvoir states (page 6):
 "The worst thing for women is to find such happiness in sexuality that they become more or less slaves to men, which further strengthens the chains linking them to their oppressors."

What do you think of that? Please write and tell us. In future we'd like to give more space in the magazine to letters on specific points raised by articles.

Send letters to Spare Rib,
 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.
 P.S. Last post goes to typesetter on March 3
 for the next issue (SR57)



It's five years since Simone de Beauvoir declared herself a feminist. Before then, although her *Second Sex* was probably the most vibrant source of inspiration to the feminist movement, she opposed any autonomous struggle of women, believing that a socialist revolution would automatically end women's oppression.

However, in 1971 she was one of the women who publicly admitted to having had an abortion, and since then she has taken part in various actions of the French Women's Liberation Movement. German feminist Alice Schwarzer asks Simone de Beauvoir about her current views on aspects of women's lives such as sexuality and housework, and finds out how being involved with younger feminists has changed her ideas.

Talking To Simone de Beauvoir

What are your relations today with younger feminists?

I have personal contacts with women, not with groups or movements. I work with them on definite projects, for example, as one of the editors of *Les Temps Modernes*, where we regularly write a page about "daily sexism".

I am also President of the "Ligue du droit des femmes" (Women's Rights League) and I support efforts to create new refuges for battered wives. I am not strictly speaking a militant — I am no longer 30, I am 67, and I am an intellectual whose weapons are words — but I am willing to listen to the M.L.F. (Women's Liberation Movement) and to help them.

I find the project to help battered wives especially important because, like abortion, the problem of violence concerns almost all women, regardless of their social class. It transcends class barriers. Wives are battered by husbands who are judges or magistrates as well as by those who are workers. We have therefore created an "S.O.S. Battered Wives" and are trying to set up homes to give shelter, at least temporarily for a night or a few weeks, to women and children if they cannot go home because they risk being beaten, sometimes to death, by their husbands.

You have taught the new feminists a great deal. Have they taught you anything?

Yes! a lot! They have made many of my opinions more radical. As far as I am concerned I have become more or less used to living in a world where men are what they are: oppressors. I have not personally suffered too much from it. I have escaped most forms of female slavery: child-bearing and housework.

On the other hand, as far as my profession is concerned, in my day there were fewer women who had enjoyed higher education. To pass the Agrégation examination in Philosophy was to attain a privileged position among women. I thereupon achieved recognition by men. I was an exception and I accepted this.

Today, feminists refuse to be treated as if they were "token women" as I was. They are right, we must fight! Broadly speaking, what they have taught me is vigilance, that we must not accept things uncritically, even small everyday things — which begin with grammar where the masculine always comes before feminine.

Left wing men have (as you once said) internalised their superiority complex, they continue to treat feminists, who have always considered themselves as belonging to the left, as "petites bourgeoises" and "reactionaries".

According to them the sex war is only a "secondary contradiction" and divides the class struggle which is the primary contradiction.

The poor dears, they can hardly do otherwise. The left-wingers are also pashas. It is in their blood . . . It is another great mystification invented by men. The man-woman contradiction is just as primary and just as basic as any other. It is after all one half of humanity against the other. To me it seems as important as the class struggle. The whole problem is very complicated. The W.L.M. will have to find the connection between the two.

In any case, nowadays, on various levels, this idea of the priority of the class struggle is very debatable even on the left, for one can observe certain kinds of struggle which do not fit in this context: the struggle of immigrant workers, for example, the struggle of soldiers in barracks in France, the struggle for regional autonomy, the struggle of the young people . . . And in particular, the struggle of women, which is common to all classes.

Certainly the oppression of women takes different forms according to class. There are women who are doubly victims: working women who are themselves workers' wives. Others who only suffer female oppression insofar as they are mothers and housewives. But even middle-class women, when their husbands abandon them, drop down to working-class living standards: they are without a job, without qualifications and without financial resources of their own . . . To deny this is yet another masculine ruse to ignore what does not fit into the struggle between men. Women, the poor dears, are asked at most for help from time to time. It is rather like the relation between black and white people.

The *Second Sex*, which is still in some way the Bible of feminism (in America alone more than a million copies have been sold) was primarily a purely intellectual and theoretical work. What

were the reactions to it when it appeared in 1949?

Very violent! Very hostile to the book and to me.

By whom?

By everyone. Perhaps we had made a mistake in publishing the chapter on sexuality in *Les Temps Modernes* in advance of the book. That was the beginning of the storm. It was extremely coarse. Mauriac, for example, wrote to a friend who was at the time on *Les Temps Modernes*: "Ah! I have just learned a great deal about your boss's vagina . . ."

And Camus, who at the time was still a friend, said to me, "You have ridiculed the French male!" Professors could not stand the book and hurled it across their lecture rooms.

And when I used to go to a restaurant, La Coupole for example, wearing rather feminine clothes, as I usually do, people would look at me and say: "Ah! that is the woman . . . I thought that . . . She wants to have her cake and eat it." For at that time I had the reputation of being a lesbian. A woman who dared to write such things could not be "normal".

The communists also took me apart. They called me a "petite bourgeoise" and explained to me: "You see, the female workers of Billancourt could not care less about what you are telling them." In fact, both the right and the left were against me.

Some people went as far as to say that it was not you, but Sartre who had written your book. In any case, even you, as far as public opinion is concerned, dominated as it is by men, have always remained the "relative being" that you denounce in the *Second Sex* — a woman who only exists in relation to a man — the "life companion" of Sartre. To call Sartre the "life companion of Beauvoir" would have been unthinkable. That is true. Especially in France, they were extremely violent. Abroad, it was better, because with a foreigner it is easier to be more tolerant. It is further away and is therefore less dangerous . . .

I know that for nearly thirty years you have been receiving letters every day from women all over the world. For many of them, you, Simone, have been, even before the new united struggle of

women, an idol, and you remain the living incarnation of our revolt. This is due, no doubt, to the whole of your work of analysis in depth of the position of women, and also to your autobiographical novels, because they presented a woman who dared to exist. Have you learned anything new from these letters?

I have learned how deep and widespread oppression is! There are women who are actually sequestered. This is not uncommon. They write to me hiding from their husbands before they come home. The most interesting letters are those from women of 35 to 45 who have married, have decided it was the right thing to do, and find themselves now completely at a loss . . . They ask me: "What can I do? I do not even have a job; I have nothing, I am nothing."

At 18 or 20, one gets married for love, and then at 30 one wakes up — then it's very difficult to survive. It could very well have happened to me, and this is why I am particularly sensitive to this situation.

It is always very tricky to give advice. But if a woman asks you . . .

I think a woman must not fall into the trap of children and marriage. Even if a woman wants to have children, she must think very hard about the conditions in which she will have to bring them up, because child-bearing, at the moment, is real slavery. Fathers and society leave to women, and to women alone, the responsibility of bringing up children. It is women who must stop working to bring up children. It is women who must stay at home when children are ill, and it is women who are blamed when children fail.

And if a woman is still determined to have children, it would be better to have them without being married, because marriage is the biggest trap.

But what about those who are already married, or already have children?

I said, in an interview with you four years ago, that a woman over 35 who stays at home is already more or less done for. After this interview, I received many very nice letters from such women who told me: "What you say is not true at all! We are still capable of looking after ourselves." So much the better. But in any case, they must try to find a paid job in order to obtain some kind of autonomy or independence.

And what about housework? Should women refuse to do more than men in the kitchen or in the education of children?

Yes, but this is not enough. In future one should find other ways to do housework. Housework should not be done only by women, but by everybody and above all it should no longer be done in isolation.

I am not thinking of special services as existed for a time in the USSR. This seems to me to be dangerous because

it turns out to be an even greater division of labour: you find people sweeping or ironing all their lives. This is not a solution.

What I think is a very good idea and which seems to exist in certain parts of China is that everybody, men, women and even children cooperate on certain days to do housework — a shared activity which can be pleasant. For example, everybody joins in to do the washing, cleaning, or anything else.

No task is humiliating. All tasks are equal. But it is the framework in which this occupation is carried out, it is the conditions of work which are humiliating. What is wrong with window cleaning? It is as useful as typing! But it is the way in which a woman finds herself restricted to typing or window cleaning which is degrading.

Solitude, boredom, non-productivity, isolation from society: all these are bad things. And this division between work outside the home and in the home . . . All work should, in a sense, be outside the home.

One hears in certain political parties and also in certain sections of the women's movement of the possibility of giving a salary to women who stay at home.

I am obviously very much against it. Perhaps, at present, women who stay at home and have no other choice would be very happy to receive a salary. That is understandable. But in the long term, it will encourage women to believe that to be a housewife is a profession, that it is an acceptable way of life. Now, this is the point: this life sentence to a ghetto in the home, this division between male and female work, work outside the home and in the home, must be rejected by women if they want to become full human beings. I am therefore against a salary for women who stay at home.

The argument of some women is that by asking for a salary, one would get people used to the idea that housework also has its value.

I agree, but in my opinion this is not the right way to do it. To reach that goal, one must change the conditions attached to housework. Otherwise this idea of value will remain linked to the isolation of women which in my opinion must be rejected. Men must share in this work and carry it out openly. It must become integrated with communities, collectives where everyone works together. This is the way it is done, moreover, in some primitive societies, where the family is not synonymous with isolation. The family ghetto must be destroyed.

You yourself, Simone, have solved this problem. You have no children and you do not live with Sartre. You have therefore carried out no household duties for a man or a family. You have often been attacked — and by women — for your views on child-bearing. They blame you for your rejection of child-bearing.

Not at all! I do not reject it! I just think that today this is a real trap for a woman. This is why I would advise a woman not to become a mother. But I do not make it a value judgement. It is not mothers who are to be condemned, but the ideology which encourages women to become mothers, and the conditions in which they become mothers . . .

You must add to that the frightening mystification of the mother-child relationship. I think that if people put so much emphasis on family and children, it is because generally they live in great isolation; they have no friend, no love, no affection, nobody. They are alone, therefore they have children in order to have somebody. This is dreadful, for the child too, who is turned into a stop-gap. And anyway, as soon as the child is old enough he runs away. He does not constitute a guarantee against solitude.

You have often been asked: "Do you regret now not having had children?" Not at all! I congratulate myself on it every day. When I see grandmothers who instead of being able to have a little time for themselves, are obliged to look after their grandchildren. They are not always very glad to do it . . .

What, in your opinion, is the role played by sexuality, as it is conceived today, in the oppression of women? I think that sexuality can be a dreadful trap. There are women who become frigid — but sometimes it is not the worst thing that can happen to them. The worst thing for women is to find such happiness in sexuality that they become more or less slaves to men, which further strengthens the chains linking them to their oppressors.

If I understand you properly, frigidity seems to you, in the present state of malaise created by the power relationship between men and women, a reaction at least more prudent and more reasonable because it reflects this malaise and makes women less dependent on men. Precisely.

There are women in the M.L.F. who, in a world dominated by men, refuse to continue to share their private life with men and thus to have sexual and emotional relations with them. That is to say, women who use female homosexuality as a political strategy. What is your opinion?

I understand perfectly this political refusal of compromise and for the very reason which I have given. Love can be a trap which makes women accept many things.

But that seems to me right only in the present circumstances. In itself, homosexuality is as limiting as heterosexuality: the ideal should be to be capable of loving a woman or a man, either, a human being, without feeling fear, restraint or obligation.



Selling 'Cause du Peuple' with Jean-Paul Sartre. Both she and Sartre have come to the aid of left-wing papers harrassed by police.

Your most famous statement is: "One is not born a woman, one becomes one." Today it is possible to prove scientifically this "fabrication des sexes" (making of sexes) the result of which is that men and women are very different: they think differently. They have different emotions, they walk differently. They were not born but have become like that. It is the result of their education and their daily life.

That this difference is a fact nearly everybody agrees. But this difference is not only a difference, it implies at the same time a certain inferiority. It is therefore doubly remarkable that with the new female revolt there should appear a "renaissance" of the eternal feminine, that is to say a mystification of the feminine.

This is for example what Jean Ferrat sings in his last hit: "Woman is man's future". And even among the women's movement, certain groups make use of these slogans. I think that today certain masculine faults are not found in women. For example, the grotesque manner in which men take themselves seriously, their vanity, their habit of thinking themselves important. Notice however that women who have masculine careers can also have these faults. But all the same, they always retain a certain sense of humour and

detachment with regard to hierarchic structures.

As for this way of beating competitors, women do not usually behave like that. And patience which is up to a certain point a virtue — if taken further becomes a defect — is also a female characteristic. And irony, a sense of reality too because women are closer to everyday life.

These "female" qualities originate in our oppression but they should be retained after our liberation and men should acquire them. But one must not go too far in the opposite direction, by saying that women have special links with the earth, the moon, the tides, etc., that they have more soul, are less destructive by nature, etc. No, if there is any truth in that it is not on account of our nature but of the way we live.

The "so feminine" little girls are made that way, they are not born that way. Numerous studies have proved it. A woman has no special value, a priori, because she is a woman. This would be the most retrograde biologism, totally contrary to everything I believe in.

What does this renaissance of the eternal feminine really mean?

When men tell us: "But just remain good little women. We will look after all

these boring things: power, honours, careers . . . Be satisfied with your place, close to earth, busy with human tasks . . ." In that case, it is very dangerous! In a way it is a good thing that a woman is no longer ashamed of her body, of her pregnancy, of her periods, I find it right that she should know her body.

But one must not make too much of it and believe that the female body gives a fresh vision of the world. It would be ridiculous and absurd, it would turn it into a counter-penis. Women who share this belief descend to the level of the irrational, the mystical and the cosmic. They fall into the trap of men who will then be able to oppress them more easily and even to keep them away from knowledge and power.

The eternal feminine is a lie, for nature plays a minute part in the development of a human being: we are social beings. I do not think that woman is naturally inferior to man, nor do I think that she is naturally superior to him. □

For an interesting feminist critique of Simone de Beauvoir's life and work, readers should look at Margaret Walters' essay in 'The Rights and Wrongs of Women', edited by Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Pelican, 1976).

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The government has just spent four years and two million pounds on a report which 'reveals' that inner areas of Liverpool are poverty-stricken and deprived, and that the slum clearance programmes of the past were "a brutal uprooting of people and communities". Defensively, councillors call for a Dunkirk spirit — and continue to cut back on housing. Only 37 new council houses were built in Liverpool in 1976, though there are thousands homeless.

Netherley, a huge council estate on the southern edge of Liverpool, was part of those slum clearance programmes. 22,000 people live there, half in flats, half in houses. *"It's Colditz or the concrete jungle,"* says Dot, a flat dweller. *"It is. I don't know how they could put people in here to live. The woman who designed them is supposed to have got a medal. I bet she wouldn't live in them rent free."*

The design is bad, the building, the drainage. So there's a high incidence of diarrhoea and dysentery on the estate, and mental illness figures are very high, especially among housewives and mothers. This substandard property is let to what the council consider substandard people — the homeless, social services cases, people with no bargaining power. At least half of the men are unemployed. There are many single mothers and twice the city norm of pre-school children — with very few facilities for them.

A few years ago tenants in Netherley began to organise and fight for the kind of housing *they* wanted. Here Maria O'Reilly, one of the organisers of the Netherley Flatdwellers Action Group, writes about their long battle with the council.

NETHERLEY UNITED

WOMEN TAKE ON THE HOUSING CORPORATION

I suppose it would only be fair to start off by describing myself in some loose terms.

I'm a housewife with three kids. I'm 28 and live with my husband. I'm also tall, thin, part-time barmaid, with the sort of teeth a dentist would be sued for insuring. I'm basically optimistic, a terrible gabber. Oh and I'm a woman, making a valiant attempt to write this article for the fourth time. I've decided before I give up totally I'll try questioning and answering myself, with fingers crossed. I hope I don't develop schizophrenia because the odd valium I take won't cure that. Here goes:

When did you first get involved in tenants' work, Maria O'Reilly?

Well, it all started in 1973 after a near

fatal accident in the block of flats where I live.

These flats are an overspill development — huge uniform lines of flats and houses, a concrete city, city being a poor word really because it implies some kind of facilities. But facilities here are non-existent. It wasn't till two years after the first houses were opened that any shops were built — there was only a mobile one. And you still have to go 1½ miles by bus to do any real shopping. In most cases the accommodation is unsuitable. The landings are draughty, offering little opportunity for socialising. The overall emotion here is usually isolation and despair, closely followed by apathy.

After I'd lived in the flats for a few months it became obvious that the

council's policy was one of total indifference. Lifts are constantly broken down. Structural defects are apparent. The leaking roofs for example make your home life intolerable.

Much of our community comes from slum clearance areas, friendly communities where people had their own front doors, with more space for the kids to play out. Life in the flats for those with kids was totally alien and the kids' response to their environment is graffiti and vandalism.

All the feelings of discontent came to a head in the demonstrations which followed the child's accident. An ambitious toddler had climbed the three foot six balcony to have a peek at the world below, but leant too far out. The housing department were reluctant to





"It's Colditz or the concrete jungle"



rehouse his family, reluctant to set a precedent, a precedent in humanity. It was only because we demonstrated and began to organise ourselves, that anything happened.

I got involved because I wondered how many would be interested in improving things by forming an Action Group, instead of grumbling in groups on the way to the shops or the rent office. The response was encouraging — over 100 came to the first meetings, over 300 of us blocked off the roads. We wanted to organise around housing allocations, repairs and the general conditions on the estate. The system by which people are allocated new housing had not been reviewed for ten years. It's assessed on points — supposedly based on living circumstances — not on

individual needs. One way of getting out of the Netherley flats is to have a medical certificate. But as a doctor here said, you need to have no legs and no head to get a house in Netherley if you're a flat dweller!

But how were we to get the City Council to take notice of our demands? We decided on a demonstration to the Town Hall with the total conviction in our hearts that the Lord Mayor would sort out the City Housing Department for us (he left by the back door when he heard we were in the foyer!). We presented a petition to his secretary who very efficiently steered us to the door. We then decided to march to the Housing Office. It was teeming down and we all got soaked.

Next we took over the Housing Information Office and refused to leave. The best aspect of the whole thing was that all the mothers and kids who were down there that day were in the same boat, all wanting to be rehoused . . . but their main concern was for the woman whose kid had been hurt. They wanted her and her kids to get rehoused. It was a tremendous show of human concern, considering the difficulties all these mothers had and the premium on rehousing.

We managed to get a list of our complaints to the District Housing Manager, trusting him to deal with them. We heard nothing. So we decided to block the main road in Netherley. This was a strategic move as it is the main road to Widness and very busy at peak



Maria O'Reilly, a founder of the Flatdwellers Action Group, in her kitchen

hours. It was a frightening step to take. We realised we would upset a lot of motorists, besides — and most seriously — the local police. Ironically they turned into our most lenient allies. They dealt with us with an expertise lacking in the housing department, and asked what our demands were. By now I'd realised it was best to climb to the top of the ladder, though harder. We asked for a meeting with the Director of Housing. With the help of the police this was promptly arranged.

“I secretly quaked in my shoes”

Two of us were chosen to represent our case to him, but we also needed an official name. We called ourselves the Netherley Flatdwellers Action Group. We set off apprehensively for our destination. The office was impressive enough. There were eight of them and three of us, including the mother of the child who was injured. I had to take my baby with me and they were quite considerate, even giving her some milk for her bottle.

What they thought of us I don't know. I secretly quaked in my shoes. But we were convinced we had right on our side. A local newspaper had printed a satirical article I had written about the flats, which helped us a lot since it was an obvious embarrassment to the housing officials. When we'd presented our case, a list of complaints and a threat to occupy the office until the mother was transferred, they relented. She was given a place, and an agreement was made that officers from the different depart-

ments concerned would walk around the estate to check our more general complaints about conditions. This was progress. We had shown we were concerned about our environment and were beginning to get organised. We were determined that our protests should result in concrete benefits for everyone on the estate.

They then set up a Liaison Committee with various officials and ourselves on it. Attending these meetings was a trial in itself since they were on *their* ground — in the city hall with its endless meeting rooms, all huge and intimidating. To me it was another world. Armed only with a Woolies notebook, a list of complaints, packets of cigarettes and a brazenness begotten by fear, I confronted the officers as the meeting progressed, feeling an undercurrent of hostility from them. After over a year of attending these meetings I realised why. To them I was an unpolished opponent, totally ignorant of procedure, with no knowledge of building, planning and allocation, a council tenant and *most of all a woman* amongst a group of men. What a cheek I appeared to have telling them where they had gone wrong. They with their huge salaries and diplomas and years of 'experience', some having worked the whole of my lifetime in their particular field. No wonder they were patronising and refused to understand any points I made. And they didn't like it when I told them the only way they could understand just how bad Netherley was would be by living there themselves.

We made some progress and won some small victories. Next we wanted to change the allocations procedure, and decided to prepare the case on behalf of

Netherley Flat Dwellers on a tenants demonstration in Liverpool last summer



Mould and sodden crumbling walls are a common problem in the flats. Here the Corporation suggested covering the walls with "a few boards".

all flatdwellers with families, not just those in Netherley. So we went round conducting surveys, collecting cuttings from newspapers. I read all I could get my hands on about housing. Finally, in 1975, we prepared a report and sent a copy to our MP with the hope that the Minister of Housing might read it.

(In November 1976 the Council did eventually pass new allocations proposals though they don't go far enough — they won't help people in ground floor flats [like myself] or one parent families. We've drafted our own suggestions for 'points' — we say people who spend two years in the flats should be automatically rehoused.)

Meanwhile things had begun to move. The council agreed to move out families with three children and those with children of opposite sexes, because they need more bedrooms. We felt elated, but

it wasn't enough — any child is in danger in the flats. Slowly the decanting began, but at present it's virtually at a standstill because of the cuts. Also the city council have decided to build all new council houses for sale not for rent, and this in a city where there's not enough housing to go round as it is.

“People now call us women's libbers . . .”

The past years of fighting round housing have been fascinating. I have faced male chauvinism I failed to see existed before. As a representative of the other women I always tried to present our case forcefully. The councilors had their salaries to rely on; I only had the other women's trust. Sometimes our faith failed us. Four years is a long time when progress is slow. An opponent once said to me ‘You never give up do you?’ Well we haven't, though we're not naive enough to think that the fight is over. We've been offered a tenants' cooperative which we think is a form of buck-passing. We wouldn't be allowed to use the rents for house building and would inherit the mess of bad planning. In fact we'd just be unpaid rent collectors and eviction squads for all the real managing of the estate we'd be allowed to do.

One of the difficulties, and one of the strengths, of our campaign is that we are nearly all women with kids. Taking the kids on demos and to meetings was a drawback when you never knew how long you'd be out. We tried to get round this by organising babysitting rotas. This wasn't really satisfactory because the women who had to mind the kids in their homes, no matter how earnestly they believed in the cause, were dampened in their enthusiasm by hordes of toddlers clambering all over the furniture. With no community centre at that time there was no alternative, and we also had to organise the meetings in our own homes. We never minded this as it gave more women with kids a chance to discuss their problems and come out of their isolation, drawing strength from one another. Some mothers were keen but didn't think it was quite nice to go on demonstrations, so they helped with the propaganda work. You see, we didn't have any money so it was hard to produce leaflets; so news of the time and place of meetings had to go by word of mouth.

We did paste posters up by the lifts. They often got torn down. We thought the council employed special leaflet-tearer-downers! They certainly spied on us to see how many turned up to the meetings.

I've known our group to club



June Moore and Maria O'Reilly listen to Maud Price describe the latest stage in her continuing battle with the corporation over the damp in her flat

together out of their own pockets to stop gas being turned off and people being evicted, sometimes out of their own rent money, getting into arrears themselves. We contacted all the major companies that directly affect our lives — electricity, gas — and we fought them all.

We have met interesting people over these years, people we wouldn't have met otherwise, people with strange ideals none of us were used to. We learned to accept people as they really were, not by what they had or whether they were dirty or poor. We came to understand politics, usually thought of

as a man's world, and expected more of ourselves — knew more about what we could and couldn't do for ourselves. People now call us women's libbers. I never realised but we must have become just that, though we're not all aware of it. Of course some of the men around regard us suspiciously and think that we hold ritual bra burning sessions to which we might invite their wives.

Then there are the vultures, those who consider us a bit crackers, the ‘you'll never get anywhere’ brigade, who sit back and reap the benefits of our efforts. There are those who don't care for us and are rude about us until they



"A brutal uprooting of people and communities"

have a problem themselves. We don't care though, it's nice to think that despite what they say they trust us enough to ask for our help when they need it. If we can give it we will, and we're not resentful of the 'vultures'.

"The estate was decorated like a May horse"

One of the things that became apparent over the years was the isolation people felt. They always compared their lives and homes to the old days, yearning after the old community. But why wouldn't people do anything? Why all the apathy? It was obvious that without a fight things would get worse. We had managed to confront some of the council's apathy and indifference, but you can't demonstrate against your own kind.

I sensed they felt Netherley didn't really belong to them. True, it doesn't, but while we live here we belong to it. You can't expect people to fight for or demand something they don't even feel exists. That's why we organised the Carnival.

What started out as an idea snowballed from a pathetic beginning to a week-long event involving thousands of people. Flatdwellers, housedwellers, people who'd been poles apart in understanding one another's problems, mixed freely in one week of fun and activity. At the first meeting three of us stood for two hours waiting for someone else to turn up. We were just about to go when three girls came. That saved the carnival.

The idea caught on and soon the meetings were attracting 60 people at a time. Street committees were organised, street parties, day events. The estate was decorated like a May horse. One

wholesaler said he'd never heard of Netherley until we started coming in for the crepe paper! On the parade that preceded the Carnival over 4,000 mums and dads, kids, grannies, aunts and uncles turned out in fancy dress. They were marching round the corner twenty deep and that's when we realised we'd won. Every organisation on the estate was involved. Schools, the community centre, the judo club. It must have been something people were waiting for and waiting to do or it wouldn't have come off. We found organisers and people with skills they never knew they had. We couldn't solve everyone's problems, people with little or no money or whatever, but we hoped people would have a happy week, something to smoothe over their wounds, a week when they'd say bugger the problems, bugger the rent and spend it on them-

"Over 4,000 mums and dads, kids, grannies, aunts and uncles turned out in fancy dress"



selves and the kids having a good time.

After the Carnival a big lorry driver came into the pub for a pint. He didn't know me but had seen something about me in the local paper. He simply said, 'Well, when are we going to start organising next year's carnival?' Then I realised we had reached our goal. Unity. People had become Netherleyites. They had stopped saying 'When are you going to . . .'

I was at home the night the Carnival ended, exhausted, wondering if it had all been worth it. An old lady knocked on the door — you see her often on the estate, she's always asking for ciggies; she and her husband look really down and out. What she said to me convinced me more than anything else that we'd succeeded. In stilted speech she asked me to thank all the people of Netherley for the lovely week they'd had. 'Everyone has been so friendly and happy,' she said, 'and my husband says Netherley isn't such a bad place to live after all.' □

Easing the Cramps

Pre-Menstrual Massage

Four days before you think your periods will begin give yourself the following massage or have someone else do it for you.

- Place the pads of the fingers of both hands around the outside edge of the ankle bone.

- Making small circles, move all around the ankle, paying particular attention to the area between the anklebone and the heel — do a little deep digging with the tips of the thumbs.

Menstrual Massage

for two people to relieve cramps

With the cramps

- Lie on your stomach, with or without clothes
- Use a blanket under you for extra comfort
- Have your arms straight out or slightly bent at the elbow
- Point your toes inwards if possible
- Tell the other person what feels good and what doesn't — it should feel good

Giving the massage

Basic Movement:

- Remove your shoes
- Stand, placing your outer leg next to the head and above the shoulder of the person on the floor
- Put the *heel* of your inner foot against the edge of the top ridge of the pelvis (same side you are standing on). See illustration.
- “Hook” your heel as much under the bone as you can. If you are not sure where this pelvic ridge is, feel for it first with your fingers. It may be higher up the back than you think.
- Keep both legs in slightly bent positions.
- Gently push away from you,

towards the feet, at regular intervals of once or twice a second. Rock your whole body by bending only at the knee and ankle of the outer leg — the one you are standing on. Move forward and back avoiding circular motion. When you are pushing firmly enough the whole body of the woman being massaged will rock too. Try not to push towards the floor with the inner foot — keep your toes pointing upwards to prevent this. Keep your heel in contact with the pelvic bone so the woman being massaged won't feel bruised.

- Increase the frequency and length of the push as long as the person with the cramps says it's comfortable. You will probably need to work more vigorously

than you first imagined.

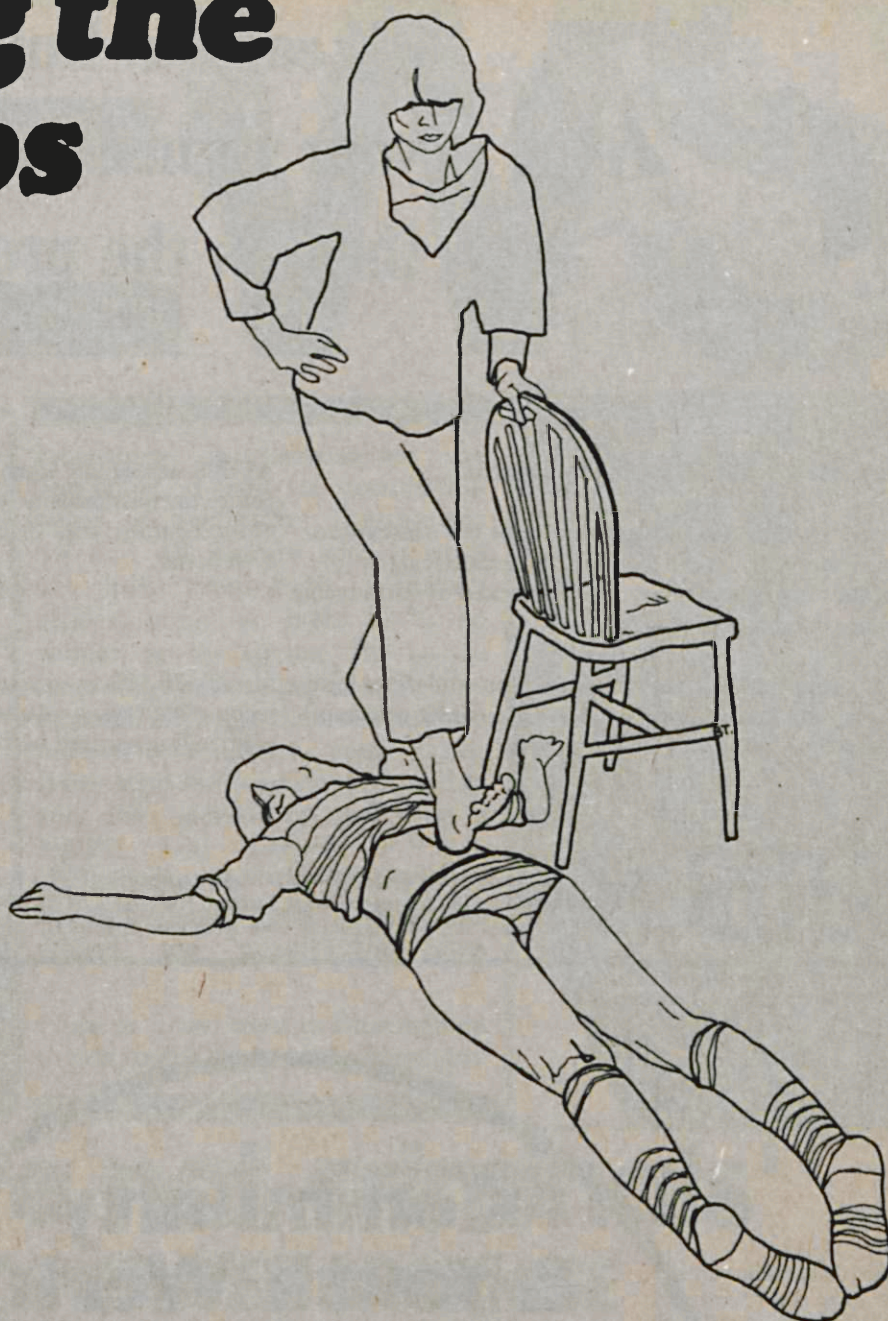
When you feel comfortable with the basic movement:

- Move the location of your heel from side to side to push at different spots along the ridge of the pelvis. Do this all along the side you are standing near. Avoid the spine.

To finish the massage:

- Move to the other side of her body
- Change feet
- Repeat the basic movement
- Change sides as often as you want and continue with the massage until the cramps diminish or go away. □

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It's easy to know your rights, getting them is the problem

The law demands sexual equality in employment.

Unfortunately employers can still frustrate the law's intentions. Equal pay comparisons can be disguised by reclassifying or regrading jobs. Equal opportunity can be blocked by introducing qualifications which few women can meet.

How do you challenge these tactics? Alone you could face legal complications, financial commitments and the consequences of failure. The real answer is union membership.

ASTMS was signing equal pay and opportunity agreements long before the idea had any legal backing. It had a remarkable record of success then; with the added support of legislation it can do even better.

Already 70,000 women realise ASTMS membership can bring success that their own unaided efforts can never achieve. You and your colleagues need both the resources and expertise of ASTMS.

astms

The Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (for further information write to Dept. M, 10/26a Jamestown Rd., Camden Town, London NW1 7DT. 01-267 4422, or telephone your local ASTMS office. You should find the number in your telephone directory).

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Are you working in your local Tenants Association, Trades Union Branch, Womens Group, Community Association or Youth Club, etc., and do you want to learn more about how to get things done?

Sunderland Polytechnic offers a 2 year training course leading to a Diploma in Community & Youth Work, which will help you develop further the necessary knowledge and skills.

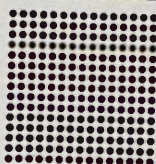
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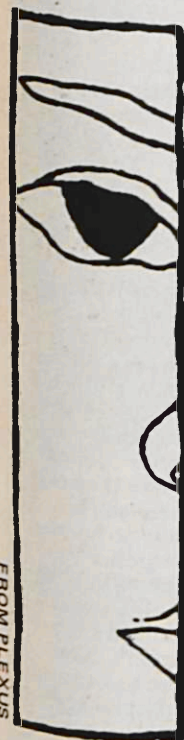
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NEWS



FROM PLEXUS



Prostitutes in Birmingham are organising to fight for decriminalisation of prostitution. A group got together 18 months ago to work out how sympathetic probation officers could be more useful to women on the streets. The prostitutes suggested a drop-in centre for informal advice and meetings. They produced a leaflet, *Red Light*, giving legal and medical information and the address of the drop-in centre. Last summer P.R.O.S. (Programme for the Reform of Soliciting Laws) began its campaign against the prostitution laws.

Victoria Green went to Birmingham to talk to PROS about their struggle.



'We're not criminals'

PROSTITUTES ORGANISE

"If the law was changed we could work together and be safe from attacks. Blokes think 'She's only an old pro, I can do what I like to her'." Susan was talking about the dangers of being a prostitute. She has been working with the group since it began: "I've been thinking about changing the law for years. We're not criminals but the law is always after us. We're picked up all the time, day after day. And now they're thinking of putting the fines up to £100. My friends say 'We're on the streets to feed the kids; I can't pay that, they'll have to send me to prison'."

Carol is in PROS; she was sent to prison for three months last summer and her child was taken into care. Louise, who used to work for the probation service, went to see her in prison: "Carol's a friend of mine and I know she's not a criminal. It enraged me that she was in there."

Eileen used to be a proba-

tion officer, she teaches now. "We started off trying to see how we could be more useful to the women on the streets. Malcolm, a solicitor, Ann, and four others formed a working nucleus. Ann left the scene after she had been to jail. The drop-in centre has made a lot of difference the girls come along and we all work out what's to be done to change their situation."

Susan was part of the group which persuaded the Balsall Heath Association, a local residents' organisation, to let them have space to meet. "They were frightened we'd use it as a brothel and that there'd be knifings or brawls; it's funny how people always think of that sort of thing when they think of us. We had to keep pressing them for months but we got it. Now we go before the Committee

every three months to keep the room. And it's working, it's central to where we work and easy to get to. I used to think seeing probation officers was like seeing the headmaster, you'd have to sit up straight and all that. Now we talk about our rights and about how to change things. We're making a video film about our lives to try and educate probation officers and magistrates about prostitutes."

"We can be picked up at any time"

But the police know about the centre, too. In theory prostitutes are free to meet, leaflet and campaign; but because the law labels them "common prostitutes", they can be picked up at any time — it's a very unclear and oppressive situation. Susan was going to the centre one night: "I saw

the law outside sitting in its car; their headlights were shining on the door. Another night I left with my mate at about 11.30 and they picked us up after we'd walked down the street a bit. They charged us with 'loitering', we pleaded not guilty but we lost. I never used to be charged with loitering, only with soliciting. They're there nearly every night, just driving about or sitting outside. We try to come and go in groups of four or five, but we can't always manage it."

"It is a problem." Louise is worried because "it might put women off coming in. The centre makes the Vice Squad's job easier because they know they'll find prostitutes coming out." And the group is always worried about losing its members; Susan is under threat of prison now. "They pick you up a few times, they tot up the number of charges and then you're in court. You stand there while they say it's



P.R.O.S.

We aim to work for the following reforms:

- 1 Abolition of the term 'common prostitute' in legal proceedings
- 2 Abolition of the offence of loitering for the purpose of prostitution
- 3 Abolition of the offence of soliciting as such
- 4 Abolition of imprisonment for such offences

Instead we advocate that:

- 1 People experiencing any persistent nuisance in the street should have recourse to law and be required to make a complaint to the police.
- 2 A system of graduated fines or other non-custodial measures is appropriate if such an offence is proved.
- 3 We believe areas of assignation could be set up where customers and prostitutes could meet without causing nuisance (we only advocate this if the first four points are met).

"pathetic, stupid victim".
"I just want to hustle in peace."

PROS is opposed to any form of licensing system. "When we were working on our programme, all the pros were against any regulation and against licensed brothels." Eileen explains that "they want to control their own lives and work without being intimidated by anyone."

New Groups Forming

They are optimistic about the campaign. "There are groups forming in Sheffield, Leamington and Leicester. They will distribute the bulletin we are bringing out this month. It will be a way for prostitutes to give their own views and we are putting a coupon in for women to send back if they want to join us. The bulletin will come out once a month and carry legal advice, news and medical information." Eileen described the difficulties they had deciding on an address where they can be reached: "There will be loads of nuts ready to harass; and of course the police can move in on any place used by 'common prostitutes'."

They are all critical of feminists who haven't taken up the issue of the prostitution laws. Eileen and Louise agreed: "We want women's liberation to think about the whole thing and discuss it, but not just use it. They have used the word 'prostitute' in a really nasty way — about housewives, to sum up their idea of the exploited situation of women. But we need allies to lobby and to publicise our programme. And we need practical help, centres to meet in and money to run the campaign." □

Contact: PROS, 39 Brockley Grove, Moseley, Birmingham 13.

the eighteenth time. It all goes on your record."

"The mere charge means you're a 'common prostitute', which means you have three previous offences against you." Eileen points out that prostitutes are the only people who have previous convictions used against them in court. (NB Men accused of rape don't.)

"We can't do anything right. If you walk down the road with a boyfriend he's accused of poncing. If you walk down the road alone you're picked up." Susan has a friend whose husband left her with four children; she's been fined £35 for soliciting. "Sometimes," says Louise, "the law actually forces women on to the streets. That woman is on social security. She has to earn

the money for the fine or go to prison."

Violence: an Occupational Hazard?

We talked about the violence women suffer. "Anne was beaten up, she had her leg broken. The police did nothing." Louise thinks the police see violence as an occupational hazard for prostitutes. Susan has been in danger. "There was this knifer around; in the end he killed Yvonne Kerr, her body was found in the river. Then the law wanted our help, they wanted us to watch out for him and give them information. They left us alone when they wanted us to help them get the bloke. We were terrified and we worked together for safety. I hired a room with

some friends and when the law found out they raided us and that was that."

"We want to publicise what it's really like for girls on the street." Eileen believes "the women themselves must do the talking or it's no good. We all take decisions together, it took us months to hammer out our programme. It's what the pros themselves want."

"It's got to come from us, we know what's going on." Susan laughs at the way people think about prostitutes: "If you're a pro people think you're somehow ill, or you don't wash or something. Blokes ask me, 'Why are you doing this?' and I ask them why they drive around Balsall Heath picking us up." Carol is scathing about liberals who see her as some sort of

THE EQUAL PAY SAGA...

Not Nice

BURY ST EDMONDS: Eight women on strike for equal pay at a garage and transport company in Suffolk were sacked on January 26. The firm, T H Nice Ltd — a member of the George Ewer Group — said they'd "repudiated their contracts" — the strike, which started on January 5, proved that they didn't want to work there any more!

So the women have applied

to an industrial tribunal, and their union TASS, the engineering union's technical and supervisory section, is trying to arrange a meeting with management. Meanwhile the picket continues in the cold and the rain.

The women do accounts and clerical work, earning on average £25 a week. The senior accounts clerk gets only £32, and the youngest at 19 gets £16 a week. Typically there are no men doing exactly the same work, so TASS is comparing them to forecourt attendants, who get a national agreed

minimum rate of £34.50 (there is no agreed minimum for white collar workers, mainly women).

Many garages are small concerns, and it's rare for garage women in particular to be in a union at all. "Only about half the women at Nice are in the union, the rest didn't want to know," said a union spokeswoman. "It was a long fight for union recognition — we had to call in ACAS to do a ballot. Now the other women are sitting inside laughing and being told what loyal employees they are. The

company wrote to each striker individually asking her to make sacrifices for the sake of the nation. Sacrifices! when the boss got £230 a week in 1975 — and that was just the official figure." □ Jill Nicholls

One Step Up

GLAMORGAN: 53 women working at the Tonypandy and Treorchy factories of "W" Ribbons Ltd., which makes webbing for seat belts and slings, have won up to £3.40 a week.

Their union, the GMWU, made a claim under the Equal Pay Act to the Central Arbitra-

MAGNAVOX:

No End to Discrimination

BARKING: For some women the Equal Pay Act has given hope but not much power in the fight for equality. The women of Magnavox Electronics in Essex partially won their case during their recent strike but are still struggling to abolish the women's grades which deny them equal pay.

Magnavox, a subsidiary of the US multinational Phillips, introduced a job evaluation scheme last year. As a result 150 women assemblers, testers and packers found themselves in the lowest grades, many earning £3 less than any of the men. It was felt by the women that the job evaluation scheme had taken place to avoid equal pay.

The final blow came when management cut three women coil-winders' wages, claiming they'd been put on too high a grade. The 250 mainly women workers, members of AUEW, the engineering union, came out in support of a call for the abolition of the lowest grades. They want women's grades 6, 7 and 8 made up to grade 5, which is the lowest men's grade.

The strike lasted just nine days, and the company were forced to make concessions after the Strike Committee, at a meeting of ACAS, the government's arbitration service, threatened increased action. But the concessions, which were accepted on January 21 and ended the strike, only abolished grade 8, putting these workers onto grade 7, 7 onto 6, and 6 onto 5. The women got a slight increase in pay, but not an end to discrimination.

Freda Cruse, shop steward, said: "The workers did not get completely what they wanted but our action has forced the company to give us something, and we will go on battling."

And Arthur Gibbard, an AUEW official, said that the men at the factory were backing the women because "so long as the women were on scandalously low wages there was very little hope of shifting their own positions". Which is virtually saying they don't want to end the discrimination, they just want everyone to take a step up the same ladder. □

Mandy Moore

Magnavox, Barking: listening to the terms of the settlement

tion Committee, the highest body dealing with the interpretation of agreement. Semi-skilled women textile workers paid at 71-73p an hour should, the union claimed, get a rise to 85p, or else get the lowest male rate

at the plant, 80p.

The GMWU also wanted women cleaners' and canteen workers' rates upped from 66p to the male rate of 69p.

The Arbitration Committee allowed the claim. Pat Turner, National Woman Officer for

the GMW, commented, "This is a major step in the battle for equal pay. We will now be seeking a comprehensive job evaluation." Perhaps at least some of the women could be valued above the very lowest male rate. □

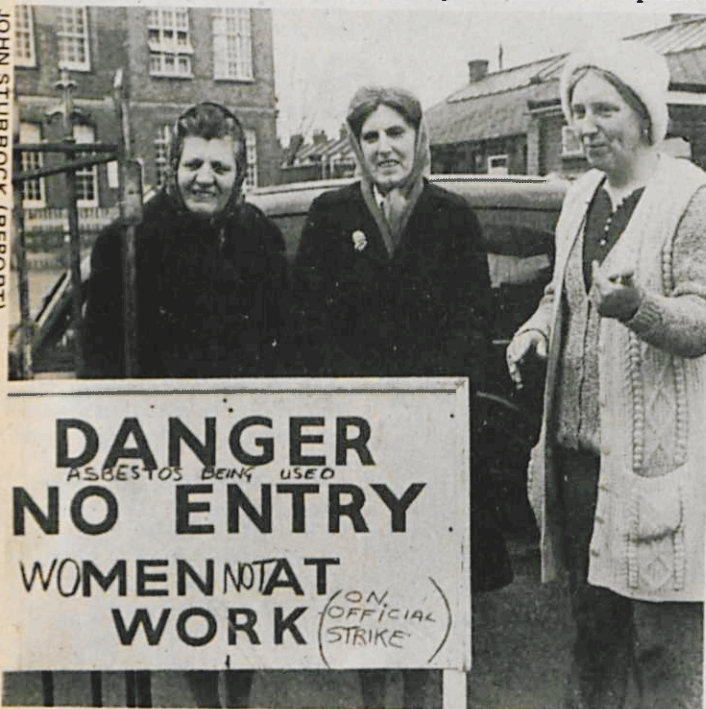


WORK NEWS

Sweeping up Asbestos

It looks like an end is finally in sight for the Holbrook Road cleaners who went on strike in September when they discovered they'd been sweeping up dangerous asbestos dust (see SR 54). Although it seemed that back in November they had won their case against North East London Polytechnic, the college where they work, not all their demands were met, so they continued to picket.

JOHN STURROCK (REPORT)



The five women have now got most of their demands: a register has been drawn up to record all those exposed to the asbestos when it was cut up inside the building; Lorraine Webb, who was sacked during the strike, has been reinstated; and their union, the General and Municipal Workers Union, is negotiating a "closed shop" agreement, so that all permanent cleaners will be unionised in future.

A working party is being set up to look into the dispute, consisting of the cleaners, a legal advisor, the union representative and some management. The cleaners hope to prove that the polytechnic infringed the health and safety regulations.

But they haven't managed to get full pay for the 17 weeks of the strike — they'll receive only three weeks pay. Anne Nicholson, one of the cleaners, says they don't want to push this too much as they would be accused of staying out more for the pay than over the danger of asbestos. As the union never made the strike official, but only the picket, they didn't even receive strike pay.

Anne Nicholson is "still bloody disgusted with the union and their handling of it — if we'd had more backing from the start it wouldn't have gone on so long." On one occasion the GMWU negotiated without them, and on January 4, when they were trying to stop drivers unloading in the yard, the union representative blithely told the drivers that the strike was unofficial so they could go on through.

Although they've won most of their demands, after all this time the cleaners are a bit disappointed. Anne Nicholson said she was "disillusioned with the staff and the other crowd in the polytechnic, but the outside help and the working class people have been tremendous."

The cleaners have drawn attention to the important fact that no level of asbestos is safe and that people should be more conscious of these hazards of work — and organise against them. The cleaners are going to carry on picketing until the promised unionised industrial cleaners arrive to clean out any remaining traces. Then they'll be taking four weeks paid leave! □ Sue Sharpe

Mothers' Shift On Fire

MANCHESTER: Some time within the next few weeks, an inquest at the City Coroner's Court will decide how seven women died in a fire on January 20.

The blaze wiped out the entire evening shift working on the top floor of one of Manchester's many Victorian buildings. They were employed as punch card operators by Northern Punch Bureau Ltd., and earned between £10 and £20 a week, with the supervisor getting about £34.

Labelling them as "mothers" and "housewives", the press questioned why the women were out at work in the first place, since they were all married with children. To

quote the *Daily Mail*: "Some were just bored with a life of household chores or needed pocket money for luxuries."

We were told that 18 children had been left without mothers, and interviews with members of the bereaved families revealed that one woman had gone out to work to earn enough to take her children to a holiday camp. One husband said he and his wife couldn't afford to live on his wages.

One doesn't hear such detail of the homes or motivation of men killed in similar accidents at work. But with all the crude headlines (*Daily Mirror*: 'HORROR OF PIN-MONEY MUMS') and sexist angles, it was one of the few occasions when women have made the news without being actresses, pin-ups or murder victims. It's rare to read about the daily routine of working women on the front page.

"We Didn't Realise"

The women, aged between 24 and 37, clocked on at six that

Against All Odds

WILLESDEN: The recent success of the right-wing National Association for Freedom in halting the boycott of mail to South Africa has meant that the Grunwick strikers can no longer be sure that mail to their factory will be stopped, should they seek the support of the Union of Post Office Workers once again in their fight for recognition of their union, APEX.

Intercepting the "Queen's Mail" is a criminal offence by virtue of some law of Queen Anne's time, designed to restrict highwaymen's activities.

The strikers — mainly Asian women — have now been out for five months over bad conditions and miserable pay. Early on, local post office

workers backed the strikers solidly and boycotted mail to the firm, a film processing laboratory which is heavily dependent on mail orders. This action ceased when the strikers' case was taken up by ACAS, the government's arbitration service, which has done virtually nothing but carry out two ballots to check that the strikers do really want to join a union!

Just before Christmas Len Murray, TUC General Secretary, took the almost unprecedented step of going to the Grunwick strikers to promise them "support", but such support is only hot air if the postal workers can't withdraw their labour and the management can go on employing scabs.

Still the strikers are determined to fight on. Anyone wanting to join the picket will find them Monday to Friday just outside Dollis Hill Tube Station. □

Ann Rossiter

Hazard at home

Apparently house dust is the single most important cause of asthma discovered — so January's *Journal of Hygiene* recommends people with asthma to get someone else to clean the house. Easier said than done for most women...

from *Women's Report*

EQUAL EXTRA

WOLVERHAMPTON: At last 75 women at Ever-Ready's battery plant have won equal pay. For 12 months their union, ASTMS, negotiated, and twice women and men at the factory backed this up with strike action.

Now every woman involved will get a rise of £3-4 a week, backdated to January 1976. □

spare Rib GUIDE TO MATERNITY RIGHTS

From February 1, for the first time, a number of women who work part-time are entitled to some basic rights under the Employment Protection Act. Most important of these are the right to join a trade union, the right not to be unfairly dismissed, the right to maternity leave, and soon, the right to maternity pay, which comes in this April. Rose Ades outlines the situation now.

THE RIGHT NOT TO LOSE YOUR JOB

If you've been working for the same firm for six months your employer may not, legally, sack you just because you are pregnant. For example, if you come in late several times because of morning sickness and he sacks you, you can make a complaint to an industrial tribunal.

He then has to show that your condition makes you unable to do your job (either because it would be illegal or dangerous for a pregnant woman to do the job in question, or in this instance because it's really essential that you arrive on time) and that there is no suitable alternative work he can offer you.

If you think you've been unfairly dismissed you can now claim up to £11,720 compensation through an industrial tribunal, though in practice you're more likely to get about £200-300.

YOUR RIGHT TO HAVE A JOB TO RETURN TO

You only have the right to retain your job while you have the baby if you have been working for the same firm for two years (calculated from 11 weeks before the baby is due) and are employed full-time — at least 16 hours a week (or for five years with the same firm for at least eight hours a week).

To qualify you must carry on working until the eleventh week before the baby is due (unless you've been dismissed — see above — or there's a negotiated sickness scheme which covers you). And you must return within 29 weeks from your baby's birth, telling your boss three weeks before you leave and again one week before you return, that you plan to return.

Your employer is only required to give you the same job "according to your contract of employment". (Since 1972 everyone has had

the right to a written statement of the terms and conditions of their employment. This must now also include a job title but it can be vague — sales assistant, ILEA teacher, etc. So you have no legally enforceable right to return to exactly the same job, sales counter, school or whatever.)

You are entitled to return to the same terms and conditions as if you had never been away — if your pay increases with the length of employment, the time you are away will contribute to the increase, but pension and seniority rights will only carry on from where they were when you stopped work.

If your employer stalls on having you back, again you can try an industrial tribunal.

NEW: SIX WEEKS MATERNITY PAY

From April 6, anyone who satisfies the reinstatement conditions (two years full-time or five years part-time with the same employer) is also entitled to six weeks maternity pay from 11 weeks before the baby is due. So you could have used it all up five weeks before the baby is even born!

It will be paid at a rate of 90% of a basic week's pay. If you rely on tips, overtime, etc., to make up a poor basic wage you'll miss out. The state maternity allowance will automatically be deducted from your maternity pay whether or not you're entitled to claim it (see details below).

The two year service rule excludes an enormous number of women — anyone under 18; the many women who have continued their education, or taken some kind of professional training, but who want to have children while still in their twenties; anyone forced to change job because her husband's job moves; and those who can only bear the boredom of their job by changing firms frequently.

evening, doing the kind of part-time work invariably done by women. One of them had taken the job after being made redundant at J.D. Williams, a nearby firm. A supervisor there told reporters that Williams too ran an evening shift: "It's the sort of job a woman with kids does, because you can leave them of an evening with your husband."

"We could see the fire from our office and we were all laughing, saying it's just a warehouse. We didn't realise there was anyone in it," she added.

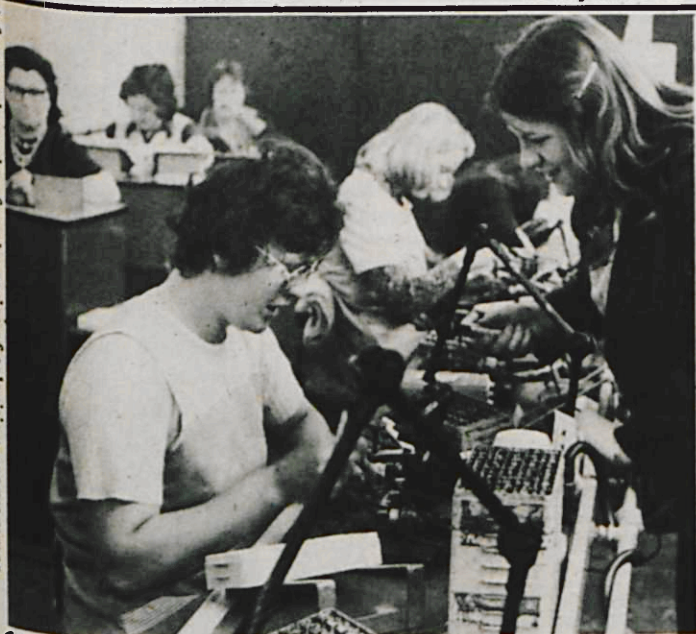
Murray House, the gutted building, is owned by a Leeds firm of drycleaners, Crockatts, and after the fire they said they had not been told there

was a night shift. Their building complied with fire prevention regulations, with manual fire alarms on each floor, as well as other precautions. It was occupied on all floors during the day with small businesses.

The questions of the safety of the building and its use will be crucial to the evidence given at the inquest, and police and fire officers are still following up points raised by the press the day after the fire.

Some papers did a round-up of other major city centre fires, but none investigated how many other women are working in similar conditions, or questioned the fact that this was a women-only shift. □

Marilyn Archer



A factory interview for the series of television programmes

'I'm never seen as myself'

GLASGOW: "To the people in the playgroup I'm just Dominic's mum, to the girls in the shop I'm just another housewife; I'm never seen as myself." Jane, mother of two and living on a new housing scheme above Alexandria, Dumbartonshire, talks about herself on *Just a Housewife?* This is the first in a series of six video tapes called *Women in Focus* made recently by local women and the WEA for a six-week experiment in community television near Glasgow.

Women from mothers and toddlers groups, playgroups, local factories and the Trades Council came together to plan and produce the programmes. For several women the meetings were a rare chance to open up about the isolation they experienced as women at home. As a result friendships grew up and two baby-sitting groups were started. "You thought you were the only one climbing the walls but you're not, everyone has the same thoughts and once you get together it all comes out in the open." These same women are now going out as discussion leaders with the tapes to mothers' groups, feminist groups and trade union meetings all over the west of Scotland.

The six tapes are *Just a Housewife?* about women at home, *Under Our Feet* about childcare, *Women at Work, All Equal Now?* about the law, welfare rights and battered women, *Body-talk* about childbirth, and *Images of Women*. Personal experiences form the basic material, but the tapes also give practical advice on self-help and information on relevant local and national organisations. □

Jenny Beale

The women are enthusiastic about showing or hiring the tapes, and are also trying to get into local schools. Contact Jane Heslop, 351 Redburn, Bonhill, Dunbartonshire.

Link-up on health

SELBY: Although they'd just finished a hard night's work in the wards and were still in uniform, eight nurses enthusiastically joined members of Leeds Socialist Women's Group in collecting signatures against the threatened closure of Selby Chest Hospital.

Selby, a small market town in North Yorkshire, has accommodated the 70-bed hospital for some years. A new coalface will soon be opened there, and as mining areas are notorious for chest complaints, there'll be an even greater need for a specialist hospital. Many of its employees — cleaners, ancillary workers, nurses — are married women living in farms and villages around Selby. A special bus goes round taking them to and from work. Loss of their jobs could mean a permanent loss of income and the chance to get out of their homes, since there's little alternative employment in the area.

The Leeds group first heard what was happening from a member working in hospital administration. At present the

hospital comes under Leeds Area Health Authority, but Leeds wants to hand it over to Wakefield or North Yorks, neither of whom are likely to take it on. If they refuse, it'll close. Hearing of local opposition to the plan, the group went to Selby with leaflets early in January, and as that went well, returned in force later in the month to a stall in Selby market, where they laid out information and petitions.

With the help of nurses and others, over 2,000 signatures were collected against the closure of the hospital. The petitions will be handed in to the three Area Health Authorities at their joint meeting in February. Further action depends on their response. □

Alison Garthwaite

Contact Leeds Socialist Women's Group on Leeds 620953.

PARIS: The fashion House of Schiaparelli re-opened in January, exhibiting a 2 million dollar dress, with 512 diamonds sewn into white chiffon. The model swished down the stairs, handcuffed to two armed guards...

TROUSER REBELLION

At Brookside Infant School, Harold Hill, Romford, women teachers and children wear trousers in class. Next door in the Junior School, cleaners, dinner staff and teachers don't, and neither did the girl pupils until ten-year-old Keeley Anderson and Brenda Anderson, her mother, protested against 'School Rules'.

Jean Baskett, the headmistress, has made it clear that she does not like her female staff or pupils to wear trousers in school. "I like little girls to look like little girls," she said to the *Evening Standard*.

"It's ridiculous to say that femininity rests on wearing a skirt," Brenda Anderson told me. "Keeley's trousers are neat, well-tailored and warm. My husband and I object to one person's outdated clothes preferences being forced on parents this way. Ms Baskett is discriminating against girls. Tammy, our younger daughter, wears trousers in the Infant School, where they seem to put concern for a child's happiness and welfare first."

Keeley says, "A few other girls wore trousers like me but when the headmistress asked them to change to skirts the next day, they did."

On January 14 the deputy head pointed out in assembly that it was gratifying to see only one girl wearing trousers. The "one girl" was Keeley.



Maternity Rights contd...

WHAT ARE UNIONS DOING ABOUT IT?

Many unions have formulated model maternity agreements which go way beyond the statutory minimum for pay and leave — NALGO, for example, negotiates for a minimum paid leave of 32 weeks, maximum 39, with unpaid leave for up to one year. Some unions — ASTMS, ACTT, NUJ and NALGO — are also pressing for paternity leave. Improved "parenternity" leave and childcare facilities at the workplace are two of the few things still negotiable within the Social Contract.

WHAT OTHER MATERNITY BENEFITS ARE THERE?

In addition to these new rights under the Employment Protection Act, there's still the old state maternity benefits under the convoluted National Insurance scheme:

Maternity Grant

This is £25 to help with the immediate cost of having a baby. It hasn't gone up since 1969! To be eligible you must have paid £18.75 worth of NHI contributions (for example 25 weeks at the lowest full rate) in the tax year which ends the April

before the calendar year your baby is due.

If you haven't paid stamps that year but have only been credited with them (because you're unemployed or ill) then you must have paid £18.75 worth in any one tax year in the past. If you are married you can claim on your husband's contributions, but if you're single you can't claim on the father's insurance.

Maternity Allowance

This is a weekly allowance you can get for at least 18 weeks from the eleventh week before the expected birth. You can claim it only on your own full or self-employed rate insurance contributions (£37.50 worth paid in the tax year ending the April before the calendar year in which the first payment of the allowance is due, or if only credited with £37.50, then £18.75 paid in any past tax year). So if you pay only a married woman's stamp, you won't qualify.

The standard rate of maternity allowance is £12.90 a week, but it'll be less if you haven't paid the full number of contributions. You can claim additional allowances for dependent children if you are single, or living apart or your

husband is incapable of work. There's also an earnings related supplement on earnings above the "lower earnings limit", currently £13 a week.

Extras

Lastly, all pregnant women are entitled to free dental care and prescriptions, and if you're eligible to receive Supplementary Benefit or Family Income Supplement, you can claim free milk and vitamins.

So what does it all add up to?

The government may have come to recognise that expectant mothers have about as much right to a job as anyone else, but the actual provisions of the Employment Protection Act, described in one union journal as "the best deal the British Working Man has ever received", combined with ever-shrinking childcare facilities, leave women still penalised for holding the baby. □

For more information try:

* *Maternity Rights for Working Women* by Jean Coussins; from NCCL, 186 Kings Cross Rd, London WC1, price 30p plus postage;
* *A Workers Guide to the Employment Protection Act* by Ivor Clemitson; from Spokesman Books, Bertrand Russell House, Gamble St., Nottingham, price 95p plus postage.



The BBC's problems

'If You Think You've Got Problems' is a BBC Radio 4 programme — someone presents a problem to a panel of experts, who try to give advice. But on Sunday 23 January it was the BBC that had the problems: the programme recorded for that date never made the air. Reason . . . Ian McIntyre, newly-appointed controller of Radio 4, found it "inappropriate for Sunday broadcast". Subject . . . lesbianism.

Jean Daintith, one of the women who took part in the programme, belongs to Icebreakers, a telephone service for isolated gays. She thinks it was cancelled because of the complaints the BBC received about a previous one — "It dealt with a man who said he found it difficult to make relationships with women and it came out during the recording that he was possibly homosexual. Dr. Wendy Greengross, one of the counsellors, encouraged him to meet gay people and to think of homosexuality as a valid expression of sexual feeling."

It was because of this

man's negative feelings about being homosexual that the women at Icebreakers were invited on the programme to show that to be gay can be fun. "The format was changed so that we discussed some difficulties we had faced as lesbians and ways in which we had overcome them. It was also agreed that a positive attitude would be taken by all concerned in the programme and that there would be no 'moral' discussion."

Wendy Greengross, who has taken part for five years in many of the programmes, commented that "the programme would have been very helpful to a large number of people. The group talked about telling their parents, feelings towards other women and men, lesbians losing custody of their children."

Attempts to get a more detailed explanation from the BBC for the cancellation have failed. Hundreds of letters were sent and phone calls made to the BBC in protest. If you want to help, phone or write to the BBC or contact Icebreakers 01-274 9590. □

Anny Brackx

DUBLIN City Council has refused a promised £6,000 grant to the Project Arts Centre because they staged a production by Gay Sweatshop about homosexuality.

One councillor said the Project was glamourising homosexuality "which in the eyes of 99.9% of people in this country is base and objectionable." □



Ideal Home for Superman

If you've listened to radio or TV in the past few weeks you can hardly have missed the ads for *Superwife*, the encyclopaedia of household management, which is, apparently, required reading to prepare you for the great new job you take on at the altar: you're going to need to be accountant, dietician, hostess, maintenance engineer, plumber and god knows what else to succeed in this important new role — when we reach W for Wages will they tell us how to negotiate the going rate for each job?

Much of the information is useful and well-presented (though some is monumentally irrelevant, like how to care for your Alabaster and what to do with Alcoves — no mention of Abortion however), and of course it's good for women to have practical competence in all kinds of areas. So it's too bad that the title and promotion is aimed at wives, not people: don't single women need to bleed their radiators? shouldn't men know how to prevent Accidents in the Home? It looks to me like a timely attempt to validate women's work at home now that opportunities for outside work are being cut back in the crisis.

Advertising sells of course, and I admit to sour grapes here: I've been harassing the local newsagent for the past year to stock *Spare Rib* — he now grudgingly carries two each month — and it was galling to see the pile of at least 50 *Superwives* on his counter. He gave me a strange and hopeful look when I asked to buy one: "Settling down at last," he said. □

Eleanor Stephens

Brenda Anderson thought the situation had reached a head, and she took Keeley away from school that afternoon. She telephoned the Equal Opportunities Commission and the local press.

Next week Keeley was still at home and no approach had been made from the school. Then Keeley's story was front-paged on the weekly *Romford Observer*. Some nationals also took it up.

"Only then did the school approach me and suggest a meeting," says Brenda Anderson. "On Wednesday 26th I met the Havering Assistant Director of Education, a Welfare Officer and Ms Baskett. I feel it became obvious to the others at the meeting that Ms Baskett's 'rules' were based on nothing more substantial than personal preference. Her excuses were pitiful. She claimed that trousers could 'get muddy in the playground'. When I said that in that case she should ask the boys to wear skirts, she couldn't answer."

Brenda did not accept Jean Baskett's suggestion that Keeley should return to

school and be allowed to wear trousers, since it would have singled her out from the others, as she was before. Instead she said Keeley would be happy to return to school if Ms Baskett agreed to send a circular to parents of girls, stating that whilst it was her preference that girls did not wear trousers, they could do so if they wished.

"The Assistant Director of Education was clearly happier about this than Ms Baskett," says Brenda Anderson.

Keeley is very pleased with the outcome. "I want to go back to school because I like it. I'm glad everything's out in the open now."

Education Authorities say they can do little to protect parents' and pupils' rights, as school rules are arbitrary and the head teacher can make a ruling in conjunction with the governing body of that school: "Their usual role is to give rulings on safety concerns. For example, a school may ban platform soles because they have caused accidents to the wearer." □

Alison Campbell

Cheap cuts

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE schools sub-committee surpassed itself in January by suggesting that school meals be abolished altogether. In fact such a step would break the law — the Education Act states that "in every school day there shall be provided . . . for every pupil as a midday dinner a meal suitable in all respects as the main meal of the day".

So Bucks is hoping to scrap pudding instead — the Department of Education has been asked to rule whether a one-course meal would be considered "suitable". If they do decide it's legal, other local authorities will doubtless follow suit, and children will come home from school hungrier than ever, needing a cooked meal in the evening.

The government wants £9 million cut from school meals this year, and four times that next year. Now the National Association of Education Meals Advisers is claiming that school kitchens are over-staffed — with wonderful convenience foods and flashy new equipment, who needs dinner ladies? (No-one if they cut out school dinners.)

Do-It-Yourself Cuts?

Another proposal is to stop "free" dinners for canteen staff (who see the meal as

making up their low wages) and for dinner-duty teachers. And the National Association of Head Teachers reckons school meal prices are "unrealistic" — currently 15p a day, they're already going up to 25p in September; the unsubsidised cost is said to be 50p. "All of us have to consider the choice," said the head teachers. "Would we rather pay more for meals, or see our children taught in larger classes with all the weakening of educational opportunities that would be involved?"

A week later any illusion of choice was crushed when Shirley Williams announced the government's intention to axe 28 teacher training colleges, merge about 15 and cut down places at 15 more. What was that about smaller classes?

Another of Bucks' bright ideas was to cut nursery schools. Five of the county's few nurseries are threatened — if they close, it will leave only 5.6% of 3–5 year olds in school instead of the present 8.4%; the national average is 12%.

Angry women demonstrated outside the County Hall on January 20, and on February 3 many schools closed for the morning while 3,000 teachers, dinner ladies, council workers and others filled the market square in protest against all spending cuts. □ Jill Nicholls

SHORTLIST

Please send information to Anny Brackx, Shortlist Spare Rib, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1

Women's Monthly Event March 19. 7pm-2am at The Basement, 29 Shelton St., London WC2. Time and space for anyone to sing, play,

talks & conferences

The Ideology Of Domesticity
February 25. 7.30pm at the Women's Research and Resources Centre, 158 North Gower St., London NW1. Speaker: Catherine Hall. Organised by the Feminist History Group. Details from 18 Lillieshall Rd., London SW4.

Literature

February 27. 2.30pm at Essex Rd Women's Centre, 108 Essex Rd., London N1. Women in literature groups talking about problems of feminist writing and approaches to literature. The date has been changed from the previous Sunday.

Women's Studies

February 28. 8pm at Friends Meeting House, Hampton Rd., Redland, Bristol. General meeting of Bristol Women's Liberation Group and a discussion on Women's Studies introduced by Miki David. Details (0272-22760).

Sex Stereotyping In Education
March 4. 7.30pm at the WRRC as above. Speaker: Vivienne Griffiths (teacher). Contact the WRRC for details (01-388 0882).



East Anglian Socialist Women
March 5. From 10am a conference at Essex University, Colchester. Feminist theories in relation to socialist theories. Papers to Jane Tilley, 40 Vanessa Drive, Wivenhoe, Essex. Information from Essex University Women's Group, 32 Wellesley Rd., Colchester, Essex. Registration 50p.

China

March 7. 6.30pm at The Institute Of Race Relations, 247 Pentonville Rd., London N1. Elisabeth Croll will lead a discussion on socialism and feminism in China.

Socialist Feminism And Trade Unions Of 1834

March 11. 8pm at the WRRC as above. Speaker: Barbara Taylor. Feminist History Group talk.

Non-Violence

March 11-13. Conference at Blackheath Friends' Meeting House, Lawn Terrace, London SE3. Details from Jenny Jacobs, 37 Rochester Way, London SE3. Cost £2. Creche.

Unemployment

March 13. 10.30am-5pm at Caxton House, St John's Way, London N19. First of a series of regional workshops exploring socialist feminist practice: 'Is Unemployment An Area Of Feminist Struggle?' Papers written by women involved in Working Women's Charter, Wages For Housework, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, TRICO, Right To Work, and Nursery Campaigns. Information and papers (send a large sae + 11p) from the Planning Group, c/o 13 Malfort Rd., London SE5. Entrance 50p. Creche.

Sociology Of Lesbianism

March 18. 7.30pm at the WRRC as above. Speaker: Betsy Ettore.

Communist Feminist Weekend

March 18-20. Mixed conference at Bristol University Students Union. Discussions on marxism & feminism, and sessions on women & health, the arts, the media, history, anthropology, education, law ... Theatre and disco in the evening. Organised by the National Student Committee of the Communist Party. Details and registration from Frankie Rickford, CUFW, 15 Somerset St., Kingsdown, Bristol 2 (0272-423753). Accommodation and creche.

Midlands

March 19/20. Regional conference at St Saviours Neighbourhood Centre, St Saviours Rd., Leicester. Workshops on fascism, lesbianism and suggestions still welcome. Performance of *The Equalities Show* by the Leicester Women's Street Theatre and Jam Today (women's band). Registration forms (£2.50 and £1.50 for claimants, OAPs and houseworkers) and information from 19 Chandos St., Leicester or Mo (0533-823789). Creche. They are short of funds and need help.

Images Of Women In The Media

March 19. 10am-5pm conference at the Polytechnic Of Central London, 35 Marylebone Rd., London NW1. Speakers: Jane Reed (Woman's Own), Suzanne Lowry (The Guardian), Alison Leigh (Westward TV). Details from Netta Swallow, PCL, 309 Regent St., London W1 (01-580 2020 x 221).

Minority Women

March 20. 10am-5pm conference at the Architectural Association, 34 Bedford Square, London WC1. Workshops on language, racism, child minding, working conditions and trades unions, social and medical provisions. Contact the Steering Committee c/o National Assembly of Women, 283 Gray's Inn Rd., London WC1 with offers of help.

Sexual Division Of Labour In Agricultural Norfolk & Northumberland

March 25. 7.30pm at the WRRC as above. Speaker: Eve Hostettler. Feminist History Group talk.

Women And Science

March 26. Conference at Sussex University, Brighton. Ideas and papers welcome. Details from Lynda Burke, 15 Camelford St., Brighton (0273-682475). Food, creche and accommodation provided.

National Women's Liberation Conference

April 1-3. At City University, Islington. Registration on Friday night. For accommodation and creche contact Joan Curtis c/o Essex Rd Women's Centre (as above).

projects

Music Register

A register for women to share and learn musical skills. A women's recording studio is also being planned. Contact A Woman's Place, 42 Earlham St., London WC2 (01-836 6081), leaving your name, address and area of interest.

Feminist Teachers

A West London group is forming. Contact (01-602 5859, 01-727 5551).

fun

Spare Rib Bop

February 25. 8pm at North London Poly, Ladbroke House, Highbury Grove, Islington. Jam Today, disco and bar.

Frankie Armstrong

March 15. 8pm college folk evening at Middlesex Poly, The Burroughs, London NW4, with feminist folksinger Frankie Armstrong. Entrance 40p.

Women's Social

March 18. Jam Today are playing in Manchester. Also regular women's music evenings. Contact (061-226 7115).



perform, talk ... Bring poems, instruments, arts & crafts. Food, coffee, bar. Entrance 50p (claimants 40p; children free). Information from Women's Monthly Event, 184 Lansdowne Drive, London E8.

Brighton Festival

March 19. At Sussex University, Falmer House, Falmer, Brighton. Still in organisational stage. Bands, theatre group, film, discussion on women and health, science, and sessions on sexism. Contact Sue Goss (0273-64681).

campaigns

Abortion

Fight The New Anti-Abortion Bill

February 24. March starting 6pm from Bressenden Place, London SW1; via Westminster Cathedral and Abbey to Central Hall rally and lobby of Parliament (7.30pm). Organised by the National Abortion Campaign, 30 Camden Rd, London NW1 (01-485 4303) and ALRA.

The Abortion Obstacle Game

17 minutes, colour, 16mm. This film, made for the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, "places four women round a board game and shows how they are affected by the obstacles thrown in front of them by the NHS system ... The women are playing for an NHS abortion during the first three months of pregnancy". It can be borrowed from Concord Films Council, Nacton, Ipswich, Suffolk IP10 0J2 (0473-76012) for a nominal fee.

Women's Rights

February 26. From 11am rally in Alexandra Palace, London, to evaluate the progress made on women's rights. Theme: One year on from the Sex Discrimination Act. Organised by the Women's Rights Planning Committee and sponsored by the Working Women's Charter Campaign, MPs, and trades unions. Stalls, displays and in the evening: "Radical Entertainment"; joint benefit for the rally and for Broadside Mobile Workers'

Theatre. Details: Mandy Snell, 33 Wemyss Rd, London SE3 (01-318 3763).

International Women's Day
Second week of March. At the Newcastle Women's Liberation Conference it was agreed that this year, there should be local activities. London: women who want to celebrate the autonomous women's movement contact (01-836 6081). There will also be a mixed march. Contact Wires for activities in other areas: 30 Blenheim Terrace, Leeds 2 (0532-35561).

Anti Racism
March 12. 1.30-5.30pm at Stockwell Hall, Stockwell Park Rd., Brixton. Themes: racism in the community and racism in the Labour Movement. Speakers: representatives from the Grunwick Strike Committee, a Soweto student and Colin Prescod. Organised by All Lambeth Anti-Racist Movement (ALARM) c/o South Bank Poly SU, 7 Rotary St., London SE1.

centres

A Woman's Place
The Women's Liberation Workshop, 38 Earlham St., London WC2, has closed... however 'A Woman's Place' has opened at 42 Earlham St (01-836 6081). Open 10am-10pm weekdays and 10am-6pm Saturdays. Feminist information centre and meeting place. Books, publications, weekly newsletter (10p per copy or 15p by post), posters, women's group list, referral service, coffee and talk. Run by open collective which meets Tuesdays 7.30pm.

plays

The Prodigal Daughters
They are a women's poetry theatre group who perform their own poems together with dancers, musicians and singers.
March 7. At Pentameters, The Three Horseshoes Pub Theatre, 28 Heath St., London NW3. Guest: Frankie Armstrong.
March 21. At The Kingston Overground. Details from Vivienne Finch (01-942 0979). Bookings: Harriet Rose (01-722 6028).

The Old Wives' Tale
March 21-April 2. 1.15pm Monday-Saturday at the Soho Poly Theatre, 16 Riding House St., London W1 (01-636 9050). A play, by Michelene Wandor, directed by Caroline Eves, about three women in their sixties who have been friends all their lives. Tickets 60p (members 50p).

photo-film

Women In The Third World
February 27. 2-10pm at International Students House, 9 Park Crescent, London W1. A day of films including *The Seedling*, *Salt Of The Earth*, *Double Day*, *Horses Of Mud*. Speaker: Mary Tyler. Organised by the Haslemere Group and Women's International League For Peace And Freedom (01-242 4817).

Women's Cinema
The cinema aims to present a comprehensive selection of films which are of special interest to women. 2.30pm at The Drill Hall, Chénies St., London WC1.
February 27. *The Whisperers* (Bryan Forbes GB 67). Edith Evans as a retired domestic whose principle companions are 'voices'. And *Trip Round Jenny* (Dina Hecht GB 75). Documentary about a prostitute who gives an annual university lecture on her profession.
March 13. *Stage Door* (Gregory La Gava US 37). Life in a theatrical boarding house with Katherine Hepburn and Ginger Rogers.
March 27. *Lina Braake* (Bernhard Sinkel W Germany 75). An elderly woman gets even with a bank that has



LINA BRAAKE

tricked her out of a flat promised her. And *Big Chakra* by Ann Severson.

Yvonne Rainer In London
March 18-20. At The Other Cinema, 25 Tottenham St., London W1: Yvonne Rainer's three films *Lives Of Performers*, *Story Of A Woman Who...* and *Kristina, Talking Pictures*. She will be

there for discussion on March 20. Her films developed out of and beyond her work as dancer and performer in sixties New York. They move back and forth between performance, autobiography and fiction, personal and emotional yet formal and distanced. Information from the Other Cinema (01-637 9308/9).

Laura Mulvey

One-Woman Show
Until March 7. 10am-6pm Monday-Saturday at Grass Roots Bookshop, Newton St., Piccadilly, Manchester, which now includes a Community Photographic Gallery. 'One-Woman Show' by Diane 'Hank' Olson is the first exhibition. Anyone interested in helping with the gallery or exhibiting work contact (061-236 3112).

Hackney Flashers
March 27. From 10am day workshop at the Drill Hall, 16 Chénies St., London WC1. They welcome people interested in setting up collective projects using photography and allied media. Details from (01-488 2595).

art

The World As We See It
March 21-April 30. 10.30am-8pm and Saturdays to 5pm exhibition at Swiss Cottage Library. Work in various media by women artists. The group was founded in 1975, and aims to present an unromantic view of life.

Sonia Delaunay
A touring exhibition of prints made by Sonia Delaunay as illustrations to Rimbaud's poems *Illuminations*. She tried to use "pure colour not to create illusion, but as something in its own right".
March 25-April 1. At Brighton, Gardner Centre.
April 16-May 1. At Oldham Art Gallery. Details of the rest of the tour from the Arts Council of GB, 105 Piccadilly, London W1V 0AU (01-629 9495).

journals

A Sindhi Woman Prisoner
This issue of *Race And Class* contains an article *Sister are you still here? The diary of a Sindhi woman prisoner* by Akhtar Baluch with introduction and notes by Mary Tyler. Akhtar Baluch is a woman student who was imprisoned for her part in the Sindhi Nationalist Movement in Pakistan. She describes the conditions in the prison and the lives of the other prisoners,

mainly peasant women. Some have committed no crime at all, others are teenage girls who have murdered their husbands at the urging of a male relative or lover, who has invariably gone free. The prison set up is strikingly similar to the Indian prison described by Mary Tyler. But even for those who have read Mary Tyler's book (*My Years In An Indian Prison*, Gollancz) this article is worth reading as a direct and moving account of the lives and sufferings of women in a Pakistani prison.

In: *Race and Class*, Winter 1977, obtainable from The Institute Of Race Relations, 247-9 Pentonville Rd., London N1 at 90p per copy. Amrit Wilson

pamphlets

Women In Society
Jean Gardiner's *Women in Society*, which is Unit 32 in the Open University Social Science Course 'Patterns of Inequality, Reform or Revolution?', could be extremely useful for women's study groups. She summarises the different approaches of Mill and Engels and uses theme texts as starting points for a discussion of the feminist movement historically and for theory of the oppression of women. She goes on to outline changes in women's position in the twentieth century, the emergence of Women's Liberation and issues raised by the movement. Sections follow on the impact of feminism in the trade unions, the class composition of women's liberation and feminism in relation to wider political questions like reform and revolution. Each section forms a clear introduction to problems which can be really confusing when you first try and discuss them.

Open University Course Units are available from Open University Enterprises Ltd., 12 Cofferidge Close, Stony, Stratford, Milton Keynes, at £1.50.

Sheila Rowbotham

The Equality Report
One year of... The Equal Pay Act and The Sex Discrimination Act; what impact have they had? How have they been interpreted by industrial tribunals? How many women have they helped? What has the Equal Opportunities Commission been doing? Jean Coussins gives a comprehensive assessment.

The Equality Report by Jean Coussins is available from the National Council for Civil Liberties, 186 Kings Cross Rd., London WC1 at £1 per copy.

Tribunal on Abortion Rights

Over 1,500 people packed Central Hall, Westminster, on January 29 for the National Tribunal on Abortion Rights. The idea of a "day of evidence" first came up last March when the National Abortion Campaign, which campaigns for a woman's right to choose, decided to boycott the biased Select Committee on abortion, from which all but anti-abortion MPs had resigned. This tribunal was to be a way of making public the evidence they'd refused to give to the Select Committee.

But the event got little publicity, before or after, and though it was sponsored by a range of organisations, probably most of those there had had at least some involvement with NAC. The day was divided into three sessions—governmental, international and medical (which included some reports from local NAC groups). In the hall itself women spoke from the platform or gave more personal evidence from the floor, and there was no discussion, though the speeches were broken up by 'guerilla theatre' and feminist songs.

The tribunal functioned as a sort of 'teach-in', a day school, and indirectly as a forum for local groups who had workshops in the lunch-hour and stalls all day in a side room. The street displays, videotapes, leaflets and pamphlets on show made clear that the vital work of making 'evidence' public is already going on, and that NAC has more strength around the country than perhaps it realised.

Frankie McGrane of North Camden NAC, and *Jill Nicholls* report on the governmental and medical sessions.

Madelaine Simms of the Pregnancy Advisory Service warned that William Benyon's new anti-abortion bill (see SR 55) was a great threat to the charities. These were set up after the 1967 Act was passed because the National Health Service couldn't immediately cope with the full demand for legal abortion. Ten years later they are still all too necessary.

"At first we had to send patients to Harley Street and cross our fingers," she said. "We went into the clinic business to obtain decent standards and bring prices down." But now there's a move to cut off the referral part of the service from the clinic, which would smash the charities and make cheap safe abortions almost impossible to find. But already, even without a radical change in the law, charity clinics are being harassed.

Every Christmas the DHSS issues licences to private nursing homes for the coming

year. This time PAS's Fairfield nursing home received a licence for only *four* months. Why? On the grounds that they'd been advertising in Spain. One of their information leaflets was alleged to have been found on a Spanish woman resident in Spain, and a Spanish glossy magazine had published an article on 'Abortion in London' which mentioned PAS.

The DHSS is supposed to use its discretion in these cases; she accused David Ennals of giving in to pressure from their commercial competitors in Harley Street, who would love to see the back of them, and from the Roman Catholic Church and its minions — "They have terrified the DHSS out of their wits."

Breaking their own Laws
Renee Short MP, chairing the government session, also attacked the DHSS, saying it was breaking the law by failing to provide abortions for women with every legal right

NANCY DUGGAN TALKING:

"I came from Ireland with three children — my youngest was 12 months. When he was four I had another. Four years later I was pregnant again but didn't really want another child. I had a regular job and my husband was getting home late — he'd been back and forward between two countries for work all his life. I felt I'd done nothing with my life except bear children. I was 43 but my doctor confirmed that I *was* pregnant. All I could feel was just awful despair. I cried and cried for hours.

"I was sent to a psychiatrist for a report. He listened and made notes and then said 'Why don't you get it adopted?' That was impossible — I'd be pregnant nine months, the kids would know, we'd become resigned to it. I explained that was unrealistic. But he said, 'Yet you're prepared to kill it?' I still get this awful feeling when I look back on him saying that.

"I'd been determined to go on but I faltered. In my mind I didn't really want the child, but I felt I must put up with what was being imposed on me.

"In fact the foetus didn't develop anyway, so at seven months I had to go into hospital and have a complete cleanout. But that was my experience and it was pretty awful."

to them under the 1967 Act. On average only 20% of legal abortions are carried out by the NHS — in Birmingham for example it's as low as 12%. With the cuts in the health service this situation is getting worse.

When asked recently to make a statement about the development of day care abortion services, David Ennals replied that he recognised that day care abortion was safe, cheap and would save the country money, but unfortunately no one at the DHSS was in charge of monitoring its development... "In the face of this degree of irresponsibility in regard to patient-care, we must face the fact that authorities will try to save money," commented Madelaine Simms. Day care facilities are in fact cheaper, but require some initial outlay — and some planning.

Day Care — Cheap and Safe
If these facilities were made widely available, a full abortion service could easily be provided on the NHS for all women now having both NHS and private abortions, claimed Professor Peter Huntingford, consultant



gynaecologist at University College Hospital, London. Only 500 doctors would be needed in England and Wales, working part-time on abortion, and it would cost less than the present system.

Most abortions are now treated as in-patient, and cost over £80. A day care abortion would cost £32 at first — including initial capital expenditure needed to adapt operating rooms, etc. — then £25 once that was paid off. Huntingford claimed that the NHS is paying about £5 million to carry out abortions on less than half the women seeking them; for £3¼ million it could provide abortions for them all.

"As for premises, there is

an abundance of empty NHS hospitals, and unfortunately, more to come. In my own district they spend £20 per day to keep one hospital closed, paying for security men and dogs 24 hours a day for the past two years."

One problem is that despite the closures, the NHS pretends there are adequate abortion facilities. Women from all over Britain gave evidence against this view: their needs are not being met. In Cardiff doctors are sending women to England for abortions as the hospital refuses to do them; 1000 women a year go from Glasgow to Liverpool BPAS; at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson hospital in London plans for a day care unit have been ditched. The main black spots are in working class and Catholic areas.

In all cases it was clear that this was a mixture of increasingly inadequate facilities and of moralistic men in power. In Birmingham for instance many consultants belong to SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child) and are able to appoint new staff and direct junior doctors. So at one hospital only two NHS abortions were done in one year — women have to pay for their 'sins' instead.

"Silly Girls Like You"

Alison from Bradford explained how she was refused an NHS abortion. An unsympathetic doctor at the university there said it was "extremely unlikely that the NHS would accept me as on one occasion I had not used a contraceptive". An NHS consultant said: "If it is unsafe to have a baby at 19, when would it be safe?" and offered to refer her to a psychiatrist. All four consultant gynaecologists in Bradford give abortions only on strictly medical grounds.

Gail from London was the only woman there to say she had got an abortion easily — because she was black and her doctor was racist. Later she heard that he never granted white women abortions, or even the pill. "Many black women in this country, not just in Puerto Rico, not just in America," Gail finished, "are getting abortions and probably enforced sterilisations simply to stop the black population rising in number."

A PAS counsellor read a letter on behalf of a 16-year-old girl who'd sought an abortion at Victoria Hospital, Worksop. Though she applied

early in pregnancy, she was kept waiting until eighteen weeks. The gynaecologist told her: "If silly girls like you are going to play around with sex, you'll have to pay for it." They inserted prostoglandin into her uterus and gave her a saline drip to induce labour. For 25 hours she was in labour with no pain-killing injection and nothing at all to drink. Eventually she was given an injection because other patients couldn't stand her screaming — the doctors argued that pain killers would slow down the contractions, but they give them to women in childbirth, and contractions at 18 weeks are just as strong. This was not an isolated case of deliberate torture, the counsellor said.

Official Intimidation
This kind of sadism and

woman-hatred underlies many official attitudes — from the vindictiveness of the Catholic Church, punishing women for their sexuality, to the clause in the new Bill giving police powers to investigate all agencies and clinics. "People who now write letters to MPs will be able to write anonymously to the DHSS and the police," said Patricia Hewitt of the National Council for Civil Liberties. "What it amounts to is a cynical attempt to intimidate women who want abortions under the guise of protecting them against exploitation."

One of the most encouraging reports came from Haringey NAC, who'd carried out a survey on a North London housing estate — a working class area where the chances of getting an NHS abortion are extremely low. They interviewed 43 people, 38 of them women. Of these, 29 favoured a woman's right to choose on abortion — they might not choose it themselves, but wouldn't impose their decision on anyone else. But they are in no position to do so. They're not the people who make the rules. □

LABOUR ABORTION
DEFEAT
BENYON'S
BILL
RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

FRANCE

Two women came from France to speak. They represented two separate groups, 'Choisir' and MLAC (Mouvement Liberation Avortement et Contraception). Both are fighting for free abortion on demand; Choisir is similar to our Abortion Law Reform Association in its composition and methods; it aims to amend the 1974 French abortion law so that girls under 18 don't have to get parental permission and the state has to pay for abortions.

MLAC takes direct action against the restrictive abortion law; we talked to Maya from MLAC about the situation in France. "The new law is reformist and does nothing to solve the problems of working class women. It allows abortions within the first 10 weeks of pregnancy only after you have seen two counsellors and your doctor who all try to talk you out of it. We want abortion on demand — and free, paid back by the 'securité sociale' (national insurance)."

MLAC has about 300 local groups around France and each one operates on a collective basis. They campaigned nationally and locally before the 1974 reform; groups

Susanna Veraguas from Chile (left), a midwife and member of a revolutionary left group, had just got out of prison. Abortion is illegal in Chile — you can only get a 'therapeutic abortion' if you have German measles or your life is in danger. Even then three specialists must sign, and most refuse as they can do it privately for profit. So thousands die of septic abortion, though there are secret clinics for the wealthy. Maya (right) represents MLAC in France.

Free our sisters, free ourselves

In the international session women from several West European countries, USA and Chile expressed their support and outlined the situation in their own countries. It was a pity that only white women were on the platform and that no one spoke of the way forced sterilisation denies women in countries like India and Puerto Rico any right to choose. But it was a very useful session. "We must defend the right of any woman to come to Britain to have an abortion where none is available at home," said Rose Knight for NAC. "We won't accept any residency clause or a quota system for foreign women."

Spare Rib talked to some of the foreign delegates.

IRELAND

Anne Connolly of Irish Women United, a Dublin-based feminist group, and Liz Miller of the Northern Ireland Women's Right Movement stressed how important it was to Irish women to be able to come to England for abortions. In the North the 1967 Act doesn't apply, and in the South even contraception is illegal, and the penalty for procuring or attempting to procure an abortion could be life. The numbers coming to England for abortions can't be counted as many give an English address or resort to the backstreets. In the North there's at least a counselling service, linked with Pregnancy Advisory Service in Liverpool, but in Eire counselling is illegal. At Trinity College Dublin last year, Anne Connolly and other students took the great risk of setting up a counselling service to help women crossing to England for abortions — to warn against possible exploitation and suggest where to go.

Their main fight though is for free contraception — their campaign CAP (Contraception Action Programme) had a display at the tribunal, showing the complexities of the law and the ambiguity of the actual practice — many doctors prescribe the pill supposedly as a period regulator; some chemists refuse to handle prescriptions for the pill. Two voluntary organisations 'give' contraceptives in exchange for 'donations' as it's illegal to sell or advertise contraceptives. Generally these voluntary clinics are tolerated, but in December the Censorship Board banned *Family Planning*, a booklet on contraceptive methods that had been in circulation for four years. Why? They deemed it "indecent and obscene" (just like *Spare Rib*! — see page 3).

In Eire it is clear that those who refuse a woman's right to choose on abortion are also against contraception, sex education and sexual pleasure, especially for women. It's vital that we all see these

links and don't reduce abortion to an economic issue only — the cuts make it harder to get an NHS abortion, but the resistance goes much deeper.

The sophisticated new anti-abortion slogan — "Take the Pill, Don't Fight the Bill" — displayed outside Central Hall that day, skates over all these issues. Even if there were a contraceptive that was 100% reliable, freely available and safe for all women, with no side effects, and that didn't interfere with sexual pleasure, there would be no reason to ban abortion, though few women might choose to use it.

STOP FORCED STERILIZATION ¡ALTO A ESTERILIZACION FORZADA!



POSTER FROM PEOPLE'S PRESS, SAN FRANCISCO

And back home, David Ennals, responsible for our national health, says: "There is no doubt that family planning is one of the most effective methods of preventive medicine. It can save the cost of births, the cost of residential care for unwanted children and later lighten the load on the education services."

started up in factories and offices, and nurses and medical students taught members how to use an easy method of early abortion. Each group performed between six and ten abortions a week, and arranged for women to go abroad for abortions. This was all done openly, challenging the law.

After the legislation had gone through most of the men working with MLAC dropped out. "It's a woman's fight now. The men said 'What we got was good enough for them' and left. Now the government feels safe to move against us. Six MLAC women are charged with performing illegal abortions in Provence and a doctor in the North has been charged for an abortion he did *before* the passing of the new law."

ITALY

Manuela Lombardo from Italy said that at least 2,000 women die there every year after backstreet abortions. In Rome alone 60 abortions are performed illegally every week by women's self-help groups. A liberalising abortion law was passed on January 21 by the Chamber of Deputies (their House of Commons) but it allows abortion only in certain cases and only up to 13 weeks, and will be more restrictive once it has passed through the Senate (their House of Lords). And as most state hospitals are run by priests and nuns, how can the law be implemented?

She told of the women of Seveso who are waiting for the results of their medical examinations and will have to continue their pregnancies despite the risk of bearing deformed children. One woman was refused an abortion by two hospitals; she was told that her fears for her unborn child were reasonable and so she did not qualify for an abortion on psychological grounds!

BELGIUM

"Solidarité avec Willy Peers" said a big blue banner slung across the stage. In Belgium the fight for abortion is linked with the name of Willy Peers, a respected gynaecologist. His arrest, at the end of 1972, for performing abortions, exploded the discrepancies between the law on abortion and what had become usual practice.

"We don't make the law into a religion," said a Belgian delegate, "so even though abortion is strictly illegal except when the woman's life

is in danger, it has never prevented doctors in Brussels and the French-speaking part, from performing them. The situation has always been worse in the Flemish-speaking part, where the Catholic party and the church have a much stronger hold over the people and the doctors are under greater moral pressure. But, since the legalisation of contraception in 1970, the women's movement has set up government subsidised day-clinics all over the country. They advise on birth control methods and, less openly, procure abortions.

Peers' imprisonment therefore came as a surprise. It shook liberal opinion and a campaign for the decriminalisation of abortion was launched with demonstrations, 100,000 people signing a petition for his release, and 70 doctors demanding to be jailed for performing abortions. The government could not ignore this; it nominated 25 experts (psychologists, doctors, lawyers, trade unionists...) to serve on an investigative commission.

It took them four years (till September 1976) to produce a report which ambivalently suggests that even though it is up to the woman to decide, abortion should only be allowed on advice of a doctor. Matters got complicated when the 12 members who disagreed secretly produced their own report proposing restrictive legislation.

At that time there was heated public discussion and mass mobilisation on the pro-abortion side, as since May 1976, ten more doctors of Brussels University hospital were being prosecuted. The whole of the gynaecological department was in solidarity with their colleagues and together with the feminist movement, which set up the day-clinics, they formed the 'Collectif de Contraception'. Members are prepared to perform abortions and to publicly admit it.

On November 11 (Belgian Women's Day), 5,000 people demonstrated for a woman's right to choose. Reina Ascherman, who lives in Belgium, hopes that parliament won't take up the abortion discussion this year: "We are bound to have more socialist deputies in the next government. If any proposals are discussed while this Catholic-dominated lot are in power, we can only expect restrictive measures." □

Anais Nin died in January, aged 74. She worked at various times as a model, a dancer and a psychoanalyst, as well as a writer. *Stef Pixner* says what she meant for her.

She lived mainly in Paris and America. She acted as a support to writers, painters, musicians and dancers; many of her men friends became famous, like Miller, Breton and Artaud.

She wrote several novels, stories and a prose poem, but the five volumes of her diaries have probably had the greatest impact on women. They had a big effect on me. For many women, a diary, just because it is private, is the only place where they can begin to express or define themselves. Anais began her diary as a letter to her father, who left her family when she was eleven. Through its volumes she traced her attempts to free herself of him, the father whose approval she so needed, who "did not want a girl", who was "over-critical... never pleased". Her relationship with him haunted her later relationships with men, where she could be turned into a child again, "without anteriority, vulnerable, stripped of power."

Living, for her, was as much

an act of creation as art was. She drew her inspiration from poetry, surrealism and psychoanalysis. She believed in personal rather than political solutions and tried to create havens of beauty in a harsh world. Anais Nin was more interested in how people felt "than what they said, or what they did, or what they were in the world." For me, her power as a woman writer was that she made art out of the intricate world of feeling and developed a language for women's perceptions. But she didn't challenge the limits of that subterranean feminine world; she nurtured others, she withdrew but never defied, she left politics to men.

In our present situation, "torn between masculine and feminine identities", Anais Nin's work is like the archaeology of traditional femininity. Within those limitations, she has created a beautiful and sensitive vision of one woman's search for herself. □

WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT VIBRATORS

As the first company to introduce vibrators into the U.K. and having sold some hundred of thousands, we feel that we know more about them and their use than most.

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These were extreme cases obviously. Normally, the vibrator is used to provide extra stimulation during love making and is particularly useful where the woman's response tends to be slow. And, of course, it is just as often used purely for personal pleasure.

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Apologies to any readers whose ads failed to appear in issues 54 or 55. Printed below.

EVENTS

● 'A WOMAN'S PLACE' has opened at 42 Earlham Street, London WC2 (01-836 6081). Open 10am-10pm weekdays, 10am-6pm Sat. Feminist information centre and meeting place. Replaces Women's Liberation Workshop, 38 Earlham Street which has CLOSED. See SHORTLIST.

WORK OFFERED

★ 2ND FULL TIME WORKER required by Shanti, a 3rd world oriented collective. £15 p.w. + rent (negotiable). A woman is wanted to help balance f/m strengths. Shanti, 178 Oxford Rd., Manchester 13

★ WANTED — THE IMPOSSIBLE Spare Rib needs inspired and hardheaded worker to handle distribution and some publicity in order to increase newsagent sales nationally. We want SPARE RIB to reach more women! Has to be someone who would enjoy the challenge — for very little money.

WORK WANTED

○ Feminist couple, cooking, office, teaching experience, drivers, world travelled, seek work — Toni. Box 568

COURSES, ETC.

□ HAS WOMEN'S LIBERATION CHANGED OUR LIVES? Lambeth CP day school Sat 26th March. Clapham Manor Baths, Clapham Manor Street (Clapham North tube) 10.30am-4pm. Speaker: Maggie Bowden. Discussion groups: sexism, the family, feminism and socialism, employment, health. Lunch. Creche. Admission 25p. All welcome!

□ WOMEN AND SOCIALISM. Course starting 8 March, informal discussion on history of Women's Movement, socialism, division of labour and other topics. Women and men welcome. For further details contact 061-881 2625 or Manchester Centre for Marxist Education, 9 Evelyn Street, Fallowfield, Manchester.

□ UNIVERSITY OF LONDON GOLDSMITHS' COLLEGE, School of Adult & Social Studies, Community & Youth Work Course. Applications are invited for admission to a two-year full-time course starting in September 1977. The course is designed to train and qualify people for work with adults and young people in a variety of community settings. Applicants will usually be between 23-43 and will have worked for a minimum of two years. They will probably have had some related experience and may or may not have formal educational qualifications. They will need to decide their own priorities, organise much of their own learning, learn from their experience.

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Selection will be by written application and interview. For further details write to: The Admissions Tutor (SR), University of London Goldsmiths' College, School of Adult & Social Studies, Community & Youth Work Course, 38 Lewisham Way, New Cross, London SE14 6NP.

WANTED

★ INFORMATION needed on how the secondary school curriculum affects girls' attitudes and career opportunities. Box 563

WANTED: volunteers
to run cliche at
women's conference
2-3 April
Contact
01-254-5821

ACCOMMODATION OFFERED

- I have a double room to let for woman with child 4½-6 years. Friendly house, big garden. Separate children's room. Ring Susan, Cambridge (0223) 52813
- Room to let in mixed house with child 30 minutes from central Manchester amid hills. Glossop 64735
- COMMUNE in Shropshire. Income sharing, re-forming in large house on seven acres, aiming at own food, energy and happiness. Need people and capital. Reply: Wheatstone, Leintwardine, Salop. Telephone Leintwardine 662

ACCOMMODATION FOR SALE

- ★ Cows? Comfrey? Commune? Cash? Commonsense? Contact Bob Gleneirw Blaenporth Cardigan a.s.a.p.; planning stage; farm for sale.

ACCOMMODATION WANTED

- Urgent mother and son, three, need flat. Central/Dials area, Brighton. Box 562
- Friendly female student, 23, would like to share flat (pref. own room), NW5 o.n.o. Max £8. Tel: 01-485 2586. Sheila.
- WANTED: HOME for woman 23 in large sharing household. Easy reach SE11. 07018 76341 (eves)
- Woman and year old son require accommodation North London urgently. Vanda Nottingham. 01-340 9486
- HELP - Girl expecting baby in May needs home anywhere with friendly intelligent people - urgent. Box 5620
- Single mother and daughter (5) seek similar to share flat W12. Tel: 01-743 3610

HOLIDAY PLACES

- NEAR SOUTH DOWNS guest-house/smallholding: out-of-season short stay accommodation for women and children. £1.30/day, or £1.20/day with sleeping bag. Meals provided. No profits. Sleeps up to 25 for small conferences, get-togethers. Write to Joyce Eidsen, Nash, Horsham Road, Steyning (Steyning 814988, Worthing 503856) or Fay Marshall c/o Women's Group, 8 Ashdown Road, Worthing, Sussex.

CLASSIFIED

TRAVEL

★ **LIFT EXCHANGE CENTRE** arranges contact between people needing/offering lifts UK/abroad and regular London commuting. 01-834 9225 (petrol sharing basis)

8:00 → 11:30
bo today
p
25 Feb
25 Mar
both at
Ladbroke House
NORTH LONDON
Highway Poly
Grove N5

THEATRE

★ "The Double Shift" Agitprop play on nursery provision + women's relationship to capitalism. Next tour starts April 12th for 4 weeks: Book NOW. We need 2 women for this play. Although acting/musical ability useful, commitment to women's movement and revolutionary socialism essential. CONTACT: Counteract, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1. 01-251 4977 or (eves.) 01-267 5059

★ **GAY SWEATSHOP** needs ACTRESS (preferably Equity) and versatile woman musician-singer. Contact: Kate Crutchley (01-505 4599) or Nancy Diuguid (01-607 0806)

★ "NO CHANGE" 2 short plays by Pat Van Twest. 1. Base Uses (pre-Christian Greece). 2. With Whom Lives The Madwoman? (modern marriage). Bristol Arts Centre late, 10.30pm 25 + 26 February. Students' Union 8.30pm 23 + 24 Feb.

★ "PENTHESILEA" presented by SALT Theatre - Queen of the Amazons clashes with Achilles in War of the Sexes. Developed by SALT from a play by Heinrich von Kleist, scripted Micheline Wandor, directed Cindy Oswin. 17-20 March at Oval House, 54 Kennington Oval, London SE11 (01-735 2786); 25, 26 March at Stage One, Deanery Road, London E15 (01-534 0882); 10, 11 April at Bristol Arts Centre, 405 Kings Square, Bristol (Bristol 45008). This play is AVAILABLE FOR BOOKING: contact SALT, Battersea Arts Centre, Lavender Hill, London SW11 (01-223 5356).

PUBLICATIONS, BOOKSHOPS, ETC.

□ **BIT RARE** - periodic printout by BIT Free Information Exchange. Cost 30p + 20p postage (UK). Write to BIT RARE, 146 Great Western Road, London W11 or phone 01-229 8219 (24 hours)

□ **THE CAULDRON** newsletter of witchcraft and the old religion 15p (blank PO) from Howard, 18a Church Hill, Purley Surrey

□ **NOBODY IS TOO POOR TO PAY CLAP TAX!** Send 16½p in stamps for latest Clap handbook/directory of projects. DOES YOUR PROJECT NEED MONEY? If radical, imaginative, + community-based, apply to CLAP Community Levy for Alternative Projects c/o BIT, 146 Great Western Road, London W11 (01-229 8219)

□ **SAPPHO** Lesbian/feminist magazine 50p inc. post. Basement, 20 Dorset Square, NW1. Meetings every Tues., 7.30pm Chepstow Pub, Chepstow Place, W2

□ **THE GIRLS' GUIDE** - 1977 FOR GAY WOMEN. Annual discreet pocket size international bar/club guide and complete directory. This fourth edition: 40 countries, 3,000 listings: centers, switchboards, publications, book-stores and much, much more. £2.00 only from: THE GIRLS' GUIDE, One, North End Road London W14 (discreet mail order only - one week delivery for all orders). Also on sale at THE GATEWAYS and STERLING'S BOOKSTORE, 57 St Martin's Lane, London WC2

□ **WIRES** is the National Women's Liberation Information and Referral Service. Send all your information and queries to us and keep in touch with the movement by subscribing to the NEWSLETTER (twice monthly). Rates: individual subs £5 a year (£3 for poorer sisters) Group subs £3 a quarter - 6 newsletters. £12 a year; each additional newsletter 50p for 3 months' supply. Send cheques/POs and donations payable to WIRES c/o 30 Blenheim Terrace, Leeds 2. T: LDS 35561 (just ask for WIRES, it's a shared phone).

□ **WOMEN'S LIBERATION LITERATURE** or any books. Send SAE for free booklist to H. Rutovitz, 31 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh.

□ Old, rare, foreign and second-hand gay books bought and sold. BCM-BREAKINGOUT London WC1V 6XX

Susan Brownmiller Against Our Will Men, Women and Rape

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GROUPS

● **CHESTER AREA READERS:** please contact me with view to forming a group. Susan Carter, Chester 319122 (evenings except Wednesdays); 16 St Johns Road, Queens Park, Chester.

● **CRAWLEY** anyone interested in helping to start women's liberation group ring Crawley 29574

● **GAY SWITCHBOARD** WOMEN need more lesbians to work UK Switchboards. Help Bristol women volunteers with UK referrals. Send SAE (foolscap) for newsletter to London Switchboard, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. (01-837 7324, 24 hours).

● **LEICESTER** womans group. Alive, active, welcomes new sisters. Come to 19 Chandos Street. (823789)

● **MACCLESFIELD WOMEN'S AID CENTRE** desperately needs funds — to open a Refuge House for battered women + children. Please send donations payable to Macclesfield WAC to Caroline Pinder, 'Bryher Cottage', Bullgate Lane, Bosley, Macclesfield. For info, speakers, ring Macclesfield 26740 (weekdays) or North Rode 462 (evts + weekends).

● Anyone interested in starting women's group in this area contact Anna, 79 Greenham Road, Newbury, Berks.

● I want to join or start women's group in Plymouth area. Please write Lesley, 6 Valley Road, Saltash

● **South London art group** artists/ mothers new members contact 01-692 8512

● **WITCHES** who still honour the Goddess would like to meet interested women, London area. Send SAE Caitlin, Box 5480

GENERAL SERVICES

☐ **Cabinetmaker/furniture** repairer. Skilled craftswoman. Phone 01-359 5250

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☐ **TYPESETTING FOR ART WORK:** Business cards, letterheads, leaflets, menus, posters (8"x11") art work, for camera-ready including advertisements and match-book advertisements. Printing from our own camera-ready if required. Phone orders taken. **GRAHAM GRAPHICS** of VICTORIA, 207 Victoria St., London SW1 (01) 828 0217

☐ **VAL and TRUCK.** Removals for women. North London 01-272 4060

FOR SALE

☐ 2nd hand standard typewriter £35 ring 01-352 3527 evenings

THERAPY, COUNSELLING, LEGAL, ETC.

☐ **GAY Switchboard**, 01-837 7324 flats, flatshares, bedsits for gay women and men. Free service, help and other gay information. 24 hr. service.

☐ **Homosexual? Lesbian? Problems?** Ring the woman at **FRIEND** to talk it over. Tuesdays, Fridays, 7.30pm-10pm on 01-359 7371

☐ **QUALIFIED WOMAN COUNSELLOR** offers advice, help, counselling for any problem and situation. Tel: 01-969 6065 preferably before 10am.

☐ **WOMAN PSYCHOTHERAPIST** (Jungian) Te. 01-348 5593 preferably before 10am

☐ **Sympathetic woman lawyer** (pro-women) willing to give advice to any woman on problems related to husbands, children, housing, police, etc. Box 544

☐ **RIGHTS OF WOMEN (ROW)** is a group of women trying to set up a national legal resource centre available to individuals and organisations working to extend and enforce women's rights. They have started a **FREE LEGAL ADVICE SERVICE** for any woman with a legal problem, but especially dealing with sex discrimination, employment, matrimonial and welfare issues. Open every Wed. evening 7-9 at 2 St Paul's Rd, London N1 (01-359 6656). Write, phone or call in.

CONTACTS

★ **NATIONWIDE** female only contacts; very private and confidential. Please send SAE for prompt reply to "Ariadne", The Golden Wheel, Liverpool L15 3HT.

FREE PREGNANCY TESTS

Also advice on abortion, vasectomy, female sterilisation and fertility control. British Pregnancy Advisory Service is a non-profit making registered charitable trust. Telephone **Birmingham (021) 643 1461** **Brighton (0273) 509726** **Cardiff (0222) 372389** **Chester (0244) 27113** **Leeds (0532) 443861** **Liverpool (051) 227 3721** **London (01) 222 0985** **Manchester (061) 236 7777** **Sheffield (0742) 738326**

BPAS

PERSONAL

★ **Girl twenty** wants companions in South London. Women into discos, art, guitar, children, reading, etc. Box 569

★ **Woman with toddler and baby** recently moved to Brondesbury NW10 would like to meet other women locally. Phone 01-459 8195

★ **Any professional single mothers** interested in meeting like person. Box 545

★ **Middle-aged woman climber** (V.S.), London-based, would like to join others for occasional weekends in Derbyshire, N. Wales, etc. Box 5610

★ **Married lesbian lady** wishes to meet similar. Brighton area. Box 565

★ **GENUINE** butch-minded girl wants butch and fem friends. Box 567

★ **PAM PICKFORD** where are you? Phone Sue Gilbert, Milton Keynes MK11 1AQ

★ I would like to contact other feminists working or interested in personnel to discuss problems and strategies to overcome them. Box 5630

★ **Guy, 31, GFT, slim, ordinary** sorta job, vegetarian, feminist, interested therapy, meditation, "growth movement" seeks female for caring but unprogrammed relationship. London. Box 561

★ **ATTRACTIVE BUT VERY LONELY** publishing executive 29 years of age heterosexual cross dresser desperately searching for sincere and understanding woman with a genuine friendship in mind. Box 564

★ **Intelligent, presentable male** looking for a lady with a heart and mind. I create through photography and writing and hopefully through a new life with someone. I found the courage to advertise, please find the courage to reply. Box 566

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reviews

WATCH OUT

SOME WOMEN OF
MARRAKECH
(ITV)



Muslim women are generally only thought of in terms of their oppression in a society where public life is completely controlled by men. Yet this excellent film in the *Disappearing World* series showed that these Arab women have developed their own remarkably close community separate from men — giving parties for each other, celebrating religious festivals, dancing and bathing sensuously together. They even hold segregated marriage feasts both before and after the groom has performed the quick ritual defloration of his virgin bride (pictured right).

These women are only allowed to associate with men of their own families so an all women film crew — the first in the history of television — was needed to make the film. I spoke with Melissa L. Davies, the producer, and Diane Tammes, Britain's first trained camera woman (picture insert). "We knew each other slightly before but we had a long search for our sound recordist, Marilyn Gaunt, and electrician, Gail Hardman. Marrakech was chosen partly because we knew a woman anthropologist who was close to the women and could interpret for us.

"We had to get permission from the husbands to film certain gatherings and we were rudely thrown out of one party by the men. But the women weren't at all intimidated by us — they thought we were a joke, banging around for weeks with all our equipment.

"We enjoyed working and living together as women and didn't notice the lack of men at the parties. What struck us most, and what we tried to show in the film, was the solidarity and good feelings among the women — while never forgetting that they are excluded from so much and have no power in the society. They seem to have a very positive self image and are less passive than women in our society; this continues as



the younger women go out to work and gradually have more freedom and independence. It will be fascinating to see how they cope with the traditional discrimination and the strict rules about the exclusiveness of the family —

which, with a 40% divorce rate is increasingly contradictory."

The women in the Granada team felt tremendous pressures to prove themselves by making a good film; I found their film very moving and let's hope that, far from being dismissed as a novel experiment, all women crews will become as recognised as male crews are now.

Eleanor Stephens

ACT OF RAPE (BBC2)



"An anaemic case of rape" was how a judge described one rape victim's experience. Three women who had been raped took part in the discussion which followed Fay Weldon's play *An Act of Rape*. Although a frustrating and unsatisfactory programme, it was at least a serious attempt to examine attitudes towards this crime and the laws relating to it.

Both the play and the discussion dealt primarily with the issue of consent and not with rape as an act of violence against women. The jury's deliberations brought out some common prejudices about rape (e.g. "She asked for it by not wearing a bra") and typically, the only juror who believed the victim was cast as a neurotic 'women's libber'.

Afterwards, the discussion group precisely reflected the power situation facing women in the police stations and the courts. The male 'experts' lectured the women on the

nature of rape; and, giving explanations for the brutality of the law towards rape victims, they seemed to imply their identification with the rapist. Ex-judge Christmas Humphreys burred on as though rape is an extension of courtship and not a violent assault; and a police doctor insisted that a victim's previous abortions are relevant to police working on rape cases.

One of the women on the programme warned against reporting rape, saying she'd found her treatment at the hands of the law worse than "what that silly little man did to me". Certainly many women watching would agree with her. It's more important than ever for women to know about the Rape Crisis Centre (01-340 6145) which apparently wasn't worth a mention on this programme.

Victoria Green

ELEANOR MARX the BBC version



This three part series on the life of Eleanor Marx (BBC2) could have given the drama department an ideal opportunity to explore the maxim "The personal is the political" and the small screen is well suited to family drama and the details of everyday life. (A series on how Great Men related to their families while producing their Great Works could be fascinating and provide an organising theme which was lacking here: Rousseau, Freud and Mao to start with?)

Of course the Eleanor Marx who emerged from this atrocious production bore no resemblance to the person portrayed by Yvonne Kapp in her great two volume biography. (Second volume to be reviewed next month). The *Radio Times* publicity and the credit sequence where the men in her life loom up and disappear behind her left ear, place her firmly in a male context dominated by "her father's towering personality". She was not, they assure us, "a grim-faced dragon of the Left" but "a passionate lover of life". We get no sense of the woman who once wrote to her sister Jenny: "Much and hard as I

reviews

have tried I could not crush out my desire to try something. The chance of independence is very sweet."

Jenny Stoller plays Tussy as a gushingly 'nice' person from a jolly family where Daddy flies kites with the kiddies inbetween wrestling with *Das Kapital* and looking, as one reviewer put it, as though he was about to burst into song like Topol in *Fiddler on the Roof*. The odd voice-over quoting Marx and Engels on the condition of the working class under capitalism or our heroine wild

eyed addressing a meeting did nothing to place her within any social context nor attempt to document the growth of the labour movement at that time.

Far from explaining the contradictions of her personal and political life, particularly her complicated relationship with Aveling, we are left with a frustrating caricature whereby an interesting woman is reduced to a masochistic goody-goody in a Gothic melodrama.

Jean McCrindle

BOOKS for children

PEOPLE WORKING

RAILWAY WORKER

HOSPITAL WORKER

BUILDING WORKER

TEXTILE WORKER

by Sarah Cox and Robert Golden
(Kestrel, £1.95 each)

In the summer of 1975 Kestrel Books published the first of Sarah Cox and Robert Golden's 'People Working' photo-portraits of British workers, *Mine Worker*, *Dock Worker*, *Car Worker* and *Farm Worker*. With vivid penetrating photographs (Golden) and a frank, informative text (Cox) they provide an outstanding introduction for children to the realities of labour. But one problem was the under-representation of women, either as workers or as figures in the home or social backdrop. Inevitable, I suppose, with

Cox and Golden's commitment to the point of production and their concern to be true to the particular factories, mines, etc., they visited.

But it is without hesitation that we can now recommend the next four books in the series, *Railway Worker*, *Hospital Worker*, *Building Worker*, *Textile Worker*. The same qualities are there of course, the concern to take the reader visually and textually right into the technical and emotional detail of work.

In *Hospital Worker* for example, we get a very detailed and sympathetic picture of the people working with the sick. But here at last women workers come into their own — scrubbing, cleaning, filing, discussing, testing, X-raying and of course, nursing too. It is not that Golden and Cox decided to concentrate on women workers, but by pointing their lens at hospital workers, they could now focus on women. With pictures of woman doctor, a male nurse and the many other traditional

Disagreement about pay slips



ROBERT GOLDEN

I told you when we started this relationship what to expect.

THE SUN IS BEHIND ME

NOTHING HAS CHANGED SINCE I BEGAN.

MY EYE HAS PERMITTED NO CHANGE.

I AM GOING TO KEEP THINGS LIKE THIS

TED HUGHES from HAWK ROOSTING

... I've got this very bad problem.

You see

I can't feel anything

oh except

maybe down there from time to time.

I had a pretty ropy adolescence —

I had you know this really oppressive demanding mother

I had acne; I wanked all the time;

I was scared of girls, no confidence ...

(no you really don't have to reassure me

I haven't worried about that sort of thing for years)

anyway

I had a kind of nervous breakdown

when I was eighteen ...

— and since then?

well, ups and downs you know, like everyone else —

except, once or twice (no don't ask me about it I don't want to be more specific)

I actually got hurt

(no don't put your arm round me, I'm fine now

nobody can hurt me now

you can't, for one)

But I do want some understanding

sometimes I get a bit

well, down —

but you're not to take advantage, play any silly games ...

on those days, I might like to go to bed a bit earlier

and stay a bit later the next morning

but you won't actually remind me about it afterwards

if you're wise ...

Anyway, I got sidetracked —

the main point is

don't expect too much in the way of feelings. That's how I am

We can sleep together from time to time

Whenever I want to

and talking —

yes of course we'll talk

interesting talks about things like

your poetry and my work

and yes gossip about friends

and we'll do interesting things too —

When I'm free, and not too tired.

we can eat out sometimes

where they have

Candles, chrysanthus and soy sauce bottles

on the tables —

and go to late night films and meet

our other friends shivering in the queue

even turn up at

the odd meeting together
walks perhaps parties ...
if your behaviour's not too primitive ...
... sex with other people? Well, of course!
Look, you're quite free —
I do not go in for
petty-bourgeois couple restrictions ... I mean
isn't that what I've just been saying?
Sometimes you surprise me you know
for a feminist you have some really weird ideas ...
And that reminds me:
Independence. I'll tell you straight.
I'm not into women
who don't lead their own lives
strongly, from their own centre.
I want someone who's got no fears about being alone —
(What do you mean, I'm here now and have been
the last few nights? Well? Well ... you can explain that
one later.)
I want you to be independent
and available (within reason of course
you'll have to do other things from time to time).
... What the fuck do you mean, contradictory?
I'm perfectly reasonable! You must never
never let anybody dictate your life to you —
I mean
I respect your inner life,
I respect that you're different from me ...
I read your poems, don't I?
All I want is for you to do the same ...
Mutual respect.
Well, I can't do it for you,
no that's something you've got to do by yourself.
I can only be your friend.
— What do you mean, a millstone?
Me? I run a fucking creche two days a week —
I practically founded the Men's Group round here,
I've been into women's problems for years.
— No, I don't find that funny, are you drunk?
Well stop laughing then. What was that?
I make up the rules?
You're fucking jealous, that's your trouble,
and hysterical and insecure,
colonising, possessive —
No, no that would be stupid. No, look ...
You're not being at all reasonable ...
Listen, why don't I put the kettle on? Eh?
... Oh and, er
look there's just one thing I did want to ask
—er, about ... um ... coming, are you ...
Well, is it ... um ... just difficult with me
Or do you actually ... have orgasms
with other people? I mean, more easily ...
Well, it's not pleasant for a man, is it
to have to ask.
Oh.
Well, I'll just make the tea.

by Stephanie Smolinsky

hospital roles, this is a book of what they actually saw, as it really is in Leicester Royal Infirmary, which incidentally they found to be a caring and sharing place.

Textile Worker too gives a compelling view of women workers, their central role in production and their place in the mill hierarchy, including shopfloor conflict between workers and management. *Building Worker* and *Railway Worker* can also be strongly recommended. All eight books should be in schools, libraries, clubs as well as in the home — a unique composite view of the work of British people, for eight years old upwards.

Andrew Mann
Children's Rights Workshop

GIRLS, GIRLS AND UGLY DUCKLINGS

BILGEWATER

by Jane Gardam

(Hamish Hamilton, £3.75)

A LONG WAY FROM VERONA

by Jane Gardam

(Puffin, 55p)

THE TURBULENT TERM OF
TYKE TILER

by Gene Kemp (Faber, £2.75)

Jane Gardam has been much feted as a perceptive chronicler of the pains of schoolgirl adolescence. Certainly, Gardam's schoolgirls are the sort with whom I would have identified as an adolescent: they are ugly ducklings, they have no close relationships with other girls, they think they see through pretentiousness and vulgarity, and of course, they come out tops at the end — sexually attractive after all, winning an Oxbridge scholarship, etc.

Bilgewater is a good example of this. Set in a boys' boarding school, motherless Marigold lives with her housemaster father. She is an oddity, learning to read late, and nicknamed 'Bilgewater' by the boys to whom she is "hideous, quaint and barmy".

When smartened up by the headmaster's beautiful daughter Paula, (just expelled from Dartington Hall) Bilge discovers her sexuality but also her brains. Can she have both? Gardam treats this question with sensitivity and satire — for example Bilge suffers an appalling weekend at the house of Jack Rose, the Captain of Rugger, when blue-blazered guests swill gin and it's Paula who finishes up on the kitchen floor with Jack with Bilge fleeing from it all. Lively comical incidents such as this crystallise with precision the conflicting

snobberies of this undoubtedly privileged world. But Gardam is uncritical of the 'cultured' exclusivity of her heroine — surely there's more to the world than combatting philistinism.

Bilge is a bright girl however, and as such a rarity in children's literature. The lonely occupants of school libraries, struggling against all pervasive pressure to under-achieve academically, will find her an inspiration of sorts — she even becomes a don!

Jane Gardam's first novel *A Long Way from Verona* has been reprinted recently in paperback and is perhaps less class-bound than *Bilgewater*, although the message is the same. The bright girl here is called Jessica and she becomes a writer.

Cricklepit Combined Junior School in *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler* is a far cry from the privileged world of Jane Gardam. Tyke Tiler is one of the more exciting girls for some time to emerge for readers of 8–10. "As thick as two short planks" is Tyke's frank description of her school friend Danny who has a speech impediment and likes nicking things. Tyke has to put a lot of energy and thought into fighting others, adults and children, on his behalf and into keeping him out of trouble. Mum is a night nurse and Dad is standing for re-election as a local councillor. Tyke is always on the go, even when ill in bed she wants a rope "for climbing and oh, things" as a get-well present.

Told in the first person by Tyke herself, this is a funny, lively book that will be ideal for Junior school story time, a chapter a day; or for young readers to try for themselves.

Rosemary Stones
Children's Rights Workshop

BOOK

THE FEMALE

IMAGINATION

a literary and
psychological investigation
of women's writing

by Patricia Meyer Spacks

(George Allen & Unwin,
£5.95)

Fiction, Ms Spacks asserts, thrives on conflict and women experience conflict in the very act of writing. A woman's

reviews

fortune, at least until recently, has been connected to the love she could attract and sustain: her value was in her social self whilst her work, her writing, was essentially private. The association of ambition and achievement with masculinity has led to some peculiar extremes in women's writing: the self-deprecating attempts at concealment of the Duchess of Newcastle who begins her autobiography, "My father was a gentleman" and ends insisting it was only written "to tell the truth, lest after ages should mistake, in not knowing I was daughter to one Master Lucas of St. Johns, near Colchester, in Essex, second wife to the Lord Marquis of Newcastle; for my Lord having had two wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should die and my Lord marry again"; the blatant exaltation of self which is the logical extreme of woman's role as love-object found in Mary MacLane's "I am distinctly original innately and in development . . . I am a genius"; the direct association of aggressive writing with masculinity which led Lillian Hellman to adopt a male pseudonym and to feel flattered by Hemingway's remark that she had 'cojones' ('balls' to you). She quotes women over two continents and three centuries — novelists, their characters, autobiographers, her own friends and students. Presenting only 'a literary and psychological investigation'

she tells us little about the backgrounds of the women she selects.

Ms Spacks studies women, both factual and fictional, without questioning the relationship between the two. Her method of using fictional characters to illustrate the constrictions on their authors' lives, and vice versa, makes it possible, reading this book, to mistake *Wuthering Heights* for the story of a teenager's problems.

She also falls into the tedious trap of associating realistic writing with good writing and, by extension, marks women down as always inferior to male writers because their experience is less great, i.e. they can't write *War and Peace* because they can't tell a Lieutenant Colonel from a Petty Admiral. Fiction which invents other worlds with other values and is particularly appealing to women is dismissed as 'escapist'. And so Ms Spacks ignores writers whose fiction has little obvious relation to their lives — Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Monique Wittig, Angela Carter for instance. Her juxtaposition of real and imaginary people and her lack of historical analysis suggests a belief in the Eternal Feminine. And her conclusion that "as women approach freedom they find it receding; as they accept limitation, it comes to look strangely like the opposite" seems to be a plea for women to remain static.

Penny Allen

FILM

NUMBER TWO

directed by Jean-Luc Godard

It is just as well that circumstance has kept me from the previous films of J.-L. Godard. I say circumstance, not accident — friends' opinions and written reviews have played their part in this; my wounds are salty enough; I've stayed away.

Just as well because otherwise I might have refused the chance to see *Number Two*, the Godard movie which, though made in 1975, is showing in London for the first time at the Other Cinema. And it is something worth seeing.

If you're familiar with his work, what I find moving you may perceive as hypocrisy; what seems to me compassion may just be self-pity.

The title, *Number Two*, according to the press handout is "both a scatological reference and a description of women's continuing role in contemporary society". But the title doesn't give away what the film is really about. Basically a male movie-maker has taken a look, through his medium, at the dehumanising of society by industry. This is a dilemma we all face; other people have made films around the same theme.

Godard looks at the dilemma's effect on the

family: in microcosm on "a family". He deals with "the (im)possibility of male-female relations in industrial society, the psychology of woman, love, sex" (press handout). Well, yes, that is what he's doing I guess, but his film goes beyond simply "male-female relations".

The children, parents, grandparents in Godard's "family" rise and fall, ebb and flow, to the rhythms of technology which control every sphere of activity: sexual, wage-earning, social, political. They are perhaps more evolved than many of us in that they have reached varying stages of anger at being thus controlled, but they are with us in not knowing how to make it all stop.

The anger of the woman, the mother, is the most emphasised and, (interestingly) the most clearly defined. The children's father is drained by a factory job, his senses under continual assault from noise and the pressure of numerous production targets. His need consequently is for comfort and shelter from the world outside the front door.

But the woman with whom he lives needs comfort, too, not knowing what her home-applianced life is supposed to be for. She feels that sexual peace is "the key", but is constantly at odds with the man she believes is using her as a release machine. "You want me to use you," he

protests. Finally, she admits that it is the social system which is a rape; she resigns herself to his bewilderment.

Throughout the film, the two children are being asked

whether each parent can be defined as: a factory, or a landscape? And it is the woman's frustration at being both while feeling that she shouldn't have to be either, that comes across absolutely

clearly, with no blurs or fuzziness.

It's really interesting, watching something with so much sorrow yet coming away feeling hopeful. And Godard — in setting the

human "need" to love against the carnivorous backdrop of technology — lights up what may be, beneath antagonisms of sex, race and class, our greatest problem.

Nell Myers

THEATRE

OUT! ON THE COSTA DEL TRICO Women's Theatre Group

Since their formation the Women's Theatre Group have been basically committed to agitprop work. Where their first two productions 'My Mother Says . . .' and 'Work to Role' were made to be taken round an education circuit, their new play is more topical and with a wider audience potential.

As you might guess from the title, the play is about the 21-week strike for equal pay last summer at the Brentford factory of Trico, an American-owned firm which makes wind-screen wipers.

The play reconstructs the strike for us by focusing on four stages of the strike, which started in the relatively comfortable days of summer (hence the title) and didn't end until well into rainy autumn. Set mainly on the picket line, we hear the case for equal pay with men doing the 'same' work, see the satirised tribunal which the union refused to attend and which has one counsel forced to argue for both union and management sides, see examples of some of the domestic problems the women faced, and the support they rallied, and finally the 'victory' which is well presented with a cautionary ambivalence. Although the women have 'won' their equal pay, one of them does a quick sum and points out that the strike has cost them about



On the picket line

MARK RUSHER (IFL)

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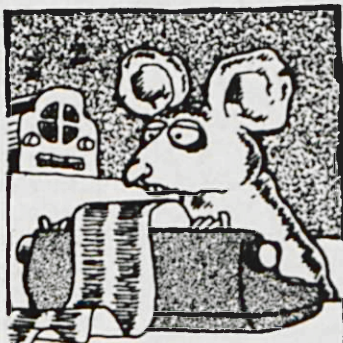
COMPLAINTS & DISORDERS

The Sexual Politics of Sickness

Barbara Ehrenreich & Deidre English



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£600 each, and given that the equal pay is not backdated, it will take the strikers two years to make up the money they've lost.

The play uses the conventional mixture of agitprop techniques: a naturalism which springs from a commitment to telling the story clearly, a presentation of character 'types' so as to show the range of women involved (single confident, Asian, single parent, oppressed wife, older woman), satire and caricature which operate as dramatic highlights, and ways of focusing on certain arguments. The songs work particularly well in this production; most of them use Radio 1-type pop as a basis for

some witty narrative lyrics, which punctuate the naturalism of the story with a revue-like air.

The group will, as usual, follow the performances with discussion, so that certain thorny issues, hinted at in the play can be more fully expanded: the legal loopholes in the Equal Pay Act, the implied criticism of the AUEW's executive for not providing strong enough support, as well as the difficulties which arise for women taking unaccustomed industrial action.

Michlene Wandor

Contact Julia, 27 Stepney Green, London E1 for information and bookings.

Claire Cherrington looks at the politics that define what happens when

BOYS & GIRLS COME OUT TO PLAY

Under the motorway, Notting Hill Gate, London



SHIRLEY BELJON

Here is the playground, there are the structures. Open the hut door and there is the table tennis. There are some girls and a lot of boys, and, my god, what a terrible noise! Inside the hut it's like a local cafe with boys shouting over the game and lolling around; outside they are all over the structures and they have got a football game going. A bunch of girls stand by a wall talking, near the hut two are playing ball, and inside one or two are trying to paint. In London, the city covered, that's a typical picture of a fairly tough adventure playground.

In others, girls participate more, but mainly in crafts activities. They make necklaces from painted clay beads in Hammersmith, tie-dyed scarves and baskets in Kensal Town, pottery in Notting Hill and candles in Islington; they paint everywhere. But outside the hut it's usually the same story — except for the playgrounds with girls' rounders or netball teams. On every adventure playground there are twice as many boys as girls and virtually no teenage girls.

Many playworkers explain that boys outnumber girls because girls are kept at home more and there's little provision for their needs. For teenage girls the lack of provision is acute, but then they're often said to have "outgrown" the playground. A woman looks up from where she's helping a small girl hammer a nail in place: "Teenage girls? They just hang around. If you ask them for ideas they just wrinkle up their noses. We took them camping and they just stayed up half the night rubbing cream into their legs!" Yet when the boys aren't there, the girls come, even teenage girls in skirts and platform shoes swing on the big jump ropes north and south of the Thames. What's going on?

BOYS RULE (NOT O.K.)

A closer look at a playground could tell you more. Some girls start painting; they're joined by a group of boys who soon turn peace into confusion. A boy's refusing to let a girl use the new paint tray, shouting, "If you touch it I'll kick your head in." But a playworker is passing and intervenes with, "One more piece of lip from you and you're out of the hut today. She can paint as well as you, if not better." With boys interfering pretty consistently, the smaller girls need a lot of such help.

"An adventure playground," says the London Adventure Playground Association in one of its pamphlets, "is a place where the natural energy and curiosity of children finds satisfaction and encouragement . . . A place where children can . . . above all simply enjoy

themselves without hurt or harm to others."

"We had a camp," a young girl points to a corner of the playground, "and the boys smashed it up. We got a lot of nice things in there and they was just jealous." "They don't never let us play table tennis, they say girls are stupid," bursts out a nine-year-old with made-up face of blue, green and silver clown patterns, and rushes off. "We come and play on the playground when it's empty," says another. An adolescent girl talks quietly, perhaps afraid of being overheard: "The boys rule the playground. They act just like we was a bit of paper. You start doing something and they mess it up . . ." She looks up briefly and then returns to drawing a very ordered flower in pastel colours. "They're wicked, just wicked. I don't know what makes them like that." There's defeatism in her voice. "Yes, I wish I was a boy." The girls' complaints rise like a chorus from playground after playground, and a vivid picture emerges of a world circumscribed not just by adults but by the unexplained prejudice of the boys.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

On almost all playgrounds girls stop coming at adolescence, except to discos. Said one teenager cornered outside the gate: "The boys don't want girls on adventure playgrounds, they just want slag (an easy lay). We don't go down there any more." A playleader admitted: "Girls are our first real failure on the playground. The boys can do anything they like, pick up a hammer, build . . ." A skinny youth looks up from battling at the hard dirt with a pickaxe and grins at the male worker beside him with a proud expression. Then, by the gate, a gaggle of lipsticked, platform-heeled, adolescent girls look in giggling and pass on. It's generally accepted they've a "life of their own" outside the playgrounds and this acts as an excuse to provide nothing for them. But what is this life?

"Great expectations, that's what it is!" The male playworker shrugged his shoulders. "Get born, go to school, get a dead-end job, get married, have kids, grow old, die . . . the boys at least have football clubs, this and that . . ." Made-up and dressed up, the teenage girl's world is secret, narrow and dead-end. The commercial empire sells them a brief moment's fun together with the dream of marriage and motherhood; when they wake up they're stuck indoors on anti-depressants with screaming babies, wondering what became of their own lives.

Many women workers admit that adventure playgrounds do not challenge

the years of conditioning at home and school. And the boys' aggressive scorn discourages most girls from trying to break out of these repressive patterns. The eight-year-old's protest of "I can't do what I want" changes slowly and irrevocably over the years into "I don't want to do anything" — the attitude that so infuriates playground workers. "Girls are bloody difficult to work with; boys are much easier," admitted one woman openly. Ironically, in losing the struggle for self-determination, the girls have forfeited any outside help.

And then in the middle of apathy another possibility suddenly presents itself. Flirtation and the adolescent commercial trip seem to make up for the disappointments of the past and promise future bliss. Playgrounds — kids' stuff; there are better things to do.

IS FIGHTING THE ANSWER?

Looking at this situation of missed

opportunities, the obvious first step is to ask why the boys bully the girls, and so universally call them stupid. "They're not stupid, they're clumsy," said one of the early adolescent gang on a West London playground. "They can't play football, they can't fight, they can't play cricket — but there's one thing they're good for." He smiles knowingly and walks off. Elsewhere you hear that girls are telltales, they don't get caned at school which is unfair, that they . . . and it's all basically true and adds up or, as one worker said, subtracts down, to the fact that boys don't respect girls.

And so some women workers and girls think that learning to fight would be a solution. For it's interesting that in every playground a few tomboys have fought their way into partial equality. If the girls could fight back instead of running to an adult or crying, the boys would have less reason for scorn and the older girls would be safer against assault and mugging. (Actually in one playground a group of girls did ask if they could learn karate — they lost the first fight, against the male playleader, who told them it would be too aggressive!)



But, as one mother said, while her adolescent daughter ran freely about a public playground, "Who wants to be that tough?" Is fighting merely an imitation of men's worst qualities? Besides, on investigation, the problem is deeper than fisticuffs could settle. Why are exceptionally tough girls called witches by the boys? And why did a group of girls who had stoned their way into an empty house occupied by boys, at once feel lonely because the boys deserted it? It seems that it's not what you do, but who you do it with: the boys prove their masculinity by excluding the girls; the activity pursued is unimportant in itself.

For the boys are trapped too. Dominated by the fear of losing face, their aggressiveness is largely based on a lack of confidence. Their image of a successful man is one who is physically violent, and violence is a constant of their lives. Beauty, creativity . . . it's sissy! And while the girls gain respect through being tough or attempting 'male'

vegetables and sunflowers, rabbits in the animal enclosure and a paddling pool, besides the usual structures. Some boys were playing football in an open space when I visited it, boys and girls were all over the structures, and there was a friendly atmosphere between the kids.

Three girls, all around twelve, surrounded me suddenly. "We're going to have a rounders match. Are you going to watch?" They took me up a big structure and talked about what girls did in the playground . . . worked on the garden, played a lot of table tennis, did a lot of camping. Here they had performed plays and dance routines in front of the boys; and, they said, the boys made space readily for them to practice rounders. They wanted to see the girls win!

What's made it so exceptional? Largely one person, a local ex-cab driver called Ray Morgan who has worked there three years. It was in his first confrontations with the boys that

even a rota for table tennis and other popular activities. Probably this sort of structuring more than anything else, makes Mint Street freer for the girls. Only on a tiny minority of playgrounds can the girls get any privacy; only on these playgrounds do they do much of their own.

FREEDOM ~ A VICIOUS CIRCLE?

For ironically, to let the girls have their own space, which is so important in Mint Street, is anathema to most playworkers. The ideal of free play lies at the very heart of adventure playground philosophy. The original idea behind the first adventure playground in wartime Copenhagen was to provide a place where kids could make their own environment and play there as they wanted. Workers have always felt that a large part of their role was as guardians protecting the kids' freedom from a hostile adult world. Possibly the cult of toughness that seems a part of adventure playground life, comes from an uncritical middle-class feeling that the way working-class kids act is totally admirable for its honesty and that the freer they are to do their own thing, the better the playground. No one has questioned the fact that this effective jungle law stops the girls enjoying any freedom.

But what, after all, is free play? What kids really like is what grown-ups do, and a lot of so-called free play is straight imitation — like building, which is the mainstay of adventure playgrounds. With equal dedication the kids imitate their parents' relationships. "Round here you don't hardly ever see the Mums talking to the Dads," says a teenage girl. This basic pattern isn't freedom: besides the limitations of their activities, the boys are trapped in aggressiveness and the girls in passivity. Ray Morgan is hard-headed about it. "If you got to the ideal I'd be off the playground. We interfere a lot, in fact. Chaos is hard to keep together; complete freedom is crap."

KIDS ALWAYS MEANT BOYS

Feminism has never been a big feature of playground history. Right at the beginning it was noticed that girls seemed to prefer decorating camps rather than making them. In the fifties in Grimsby the likely explanation for this emerged when the nine elected leaders of boys' camps refused to accept the leader of the girl's camp onto the playground committee. There's no



Playing cards at Mint Street, Southwark, London

activities, the boys lose it in being gentle or doing 'women's' activities. As things are, the boys have no motivation to change their behaviour, and the girls little chance.

LESS AGGRO & MORE PRIVACY

Here we might be at a stalemate, but one playground stands out as an exception. Mint Street in Southwark is held up by most playworkers as an example of what can be done. It's a walled-in vacant lot, surrounded by old, red-brick blocks of flats where single people and old people live. There's a hidden-away feel to it, a garden with

he began to create a different sort of playground . . . he didn't come on tough, but laughed them into confusion. As time went on they began to see how they could respect someone who was not aggressive. If, as seems true, the biggest obstacle to the girls' activity is hassling by the boys, then reducing the aggression level makes complete sense. Ray also pointed out that the boys jeer at the girls' performances only because they want to act too — but they won't let themselves. It's too sissy! To get the boys to be more at ease with themselves, he's been getting them to play non-aggressive touching games.

The other side of the coin at Southwark is the approach to the girls: they're allowed to shut themselves away in the office to get their dance routines and plays together. There's

record of the playleader protesting, or even realising this discrimination: it was noted only as an interesting fact.

Adventure playgrounds boomed in the 'urban crisis' of the late sixties. Authorities and parents wanted to keep boys out of street crime; the scores of new playworkers, radicals among them, wanted to build local communities and let the kids enjoy some freedom. 'Kids' still meant boys.

The organisation that might be taking more initiatives in fighting sexism in playgrounds is the London Adventure Playground Association. Founded in 1962 as a charity to promote playgrounds, in 1969 it fused with the Greater London Playing Fields Association and now trains workers and supervises some grants as well as advising on playground policy. Their playgrounds form the model for the increasing numbers of Borough Council and GLC playgrounds which are springing up like mushrooms. But while LAPA playgrounds have some independence because they are answerable only to a management committee of local people, the authority ones are evidently bureaucratically run. So LAPA is the place you'd look to for new ideas.

In vain! Indeed it was a LAPA man accidentally encountered who came out with the extraordinary statement that teenage boys needed playgrounds more than girls because they had the more difficult male dating role to learn! Sexism isn't in LAPA's vocabulary; the study of sex roles in childhood forms only a part of a part of a term's course. The overwhelming majority of leaders and workers appointed with their advice are male; there is no screening of applicants with sexist attitudes. The feeling of the women members of LAPA who I talked to was that something would happen in good time — not exactly the best way to step forward.

NATURAL ALLIES

The women workers themselves have a hard time of it. Outnumbered in playgrounds and mostly in assistant positions, they speak with remarkable calmness of occupational hazards like de-knifing angry youths and kicking off rape attempts. But this situation proved too much for two LAPA trainees, who complained so vociferously that a Women Workers in Adventure Playgrounds group was set up in December 1975*. The group's first action was to force through a ruling that there should always be at least two workers on a playground. They have also run a structure-building course, because incompetence at such skills really weakens the women's position on the playground.



However, it's one thing for the women to learn to build and another to gain acceptance as equals and thereby serve as a positive model for the girls. The major problem here is the rampant sexism of many male playworkers. Some of them have no more in their heads than ambitions to run boys' labour camps. One teenage girl complained: "The playleader said I only went there to flirt and get the boys to touch my tits." This sort of attitude, together with the sexism of the boys, places the women in a difficult dilemma. If they accept the traditional role they are pushed into, they are stuck with crafts and the under-fives. But if they take an equal part in all activities, they are then too 'tough' for the feminine girls.

Challenging roles raises other difficulties too. Although there's a feeling that once teenage girls were interested in the playgrounds they'd get involved in other things, their first interests are make-up and dressmaking and a lot of feminist playworkers have objections to starting such classes.

Nonetheless, it's the women workers who are the girls' most hopeful, widespread source of help, and it's exciting to hear that the WWAP group is in the process of making up a report on sex roles in playgrounds to present to LAPA. Other, and fragmentary,

attempts to reduce sexism can be found here and there. A worker from a Yorkshire playground told of the time the girls trooped into her office shouting, "No littlies, no boys." They had a good discussion about sex and later the boys and girls talked together about the double standard of morality. Elsewhere video has been used, a good tool for changing images because seeing yourself gives confidence and shows up role acting. Balancing games can also be useful, as girls balance better than boys; this leads into the whole gymnastic area, so under valued in this country.

There's no real shortage of ideas. What's needed is recognition of the problem and specific action to fight sexism. LAPA could do a tremendous amount here in getting the subject accepted — and even more by making feminism a necessary qualification for adventure playground work. And the widely held ideal of 'free play' needs to be re-examined.

The opportunities are there for original and desperately needed work. But until they are seized, girls will continue to be outsiders, with little chance to develop either activities or themselves.□

* The group meets on the second Tuesday of every month at the Women's Liberation Workshop, 38 Earlham St., London WC2. (01-836 6081).

Glasgow Women's Centre

The new Women's Centre is in the city centre. Opening hours are from 10-2 on weekdays so that women with children out shopping and office workers in their lunch hours will be able to call in. It is also open nearly every evening and all day Saturday. They deliberately looked for premises in the city centre to be available to all women rather than a local community only.

An information and advice service will start on March 1. Two workers at the centre, paid under the Job Creation Scheme, will concentrate on building up contacts outside the movement to relate women's liberation to local women's issues, and compile reports on women's lives in Strathclyde, the area round Glasgow.

The centre will house a bookshop and library, and each month women from groups who use the centre produce a newsletter which is sent out to more than 100 women.

A group meets every Thursday at 6.30 to discuss the running of the centre; anyone is welcome to join. Every second Thursday there's an open meeting for new women at 7.30; every third Thursday is a general business meeting for everyone and on the other Thursdays there are discussions.

Glasgow National Abortion Campaign

Glasgow NAC is active in an area where 1000 women must flee south for an abortion, where SPUC commands enormous support and where, compared to other areas in Scotland, women have only half the chance of a legal abortion.

They run an information stall in Glasgow's "Barras" market - a weekend market similar to London's Petticoat Lane; other activities include petitioning for an NHS out-patients clinic, and heckling at SPUC events.

In an attempt to get TUC affiliation and support, they are compiling a statistical fact sheet and sending questionnaires to local GPs. The response from the initial 300 has been sympathetic.

Glasgow Women in Media

Glasgow WIM tries to monitor and improve the media image of women. It has campaigned against restrictive abortion laws, and produced leaflets on divorce, housing, battered women and abortion - giving information and listing sources of help. One member is on the national NUJ equality working party.

Scottish Women's Liberation Journal

The journal starts in 1977 (edited collectively by women from different groups in Scotland.) Hopefully it will make up for the appalling lack of information on women in Scotland.

Women's Aid

'Interval House' provides accommodation for six battered women and their families. It operates on a self-help basis with a woman from the support group working part time. A Job Creation worker concentrates on follow up work. They have recently got a second house. Offers of money and help to 041 221 1177.

Adult Education and WEA Classes

Glasgow University extra-mural department has sponsored several classes on women's issues and the WEA has run courses in community centres.

Collective Child Care and Babysitting

About twenty women, some with and some without children, run a rota system of child-care from the centre, and also have a babysitters list. Any woman is welcome to join.

Scotland's disastrous economic past, characterised by high unemployment and emigration, has its particular effect both on the way Scots men see themselves and on the position of Scottish women. Scots of both sexes are conscious of their colonised status in relation to England, but all too often the Scots male makes up for his secondary citizenship by asserting an especially macho stance towards women. Scots men consider themselves the only 'real' men, Englishmen are cissies who help with the washing up ('women's work').

Glasgow, Scotland's major industrial city, has always been strong on labour militancy but traditional trade union perspectives ignore the conditions in which women live - the vast housing schemes, the isolation of tower blocks, the whole struggle of women in the home and the community.

In this context, Glasgow's women's liberation group are battling to give women the means to speak out and organise politically for themselves.

GOING STRONG IN GLASGOW



Next month Leicester . . . Please contact *Spare Rib* if you want a page on your town/region.

Women's Centre Fund

The Centre needs support until it is financially independent. If you can afford it please give monthly banker's orders to Glasgow Women's Liberation Group, Co-operative Bank Ltd, 11 Laidlaw Street, Glasgow; account number 50070268.

Contact all these groups via the Women's Centre, 57 Miller Street, (third floor, with a lift); phone 041 221 1177.

Political Discussion Group

They are studying historical and theoretical literature to evaluate traditional ideological concepts from a feminist viewpoint. The group hopes to get involved in local women's struggles.

Financial and Legal Independence Group

They have produced "Women and Housing", a pamphlet relevant to all Strathclyde women; available from the Women's Centre for 30p. They're working on two follow-up booklets on the social services (local authority, trade unions etc) and on taxation and pensions - the latter in conjunction with other Legal and Financial Independence groups. They helped make a WEA video film "All Equal Now?" (see *News*) and are now making a film about women and housing.

Women and Health

There is no active group at present, but the Women's Centre has a referral list and a description of GPs in the area. You can help by giving details of your own GP to the centre.

Working Women's Charter

They are planning a Scottish rally to be held soon in Glasgow's McLellan Galleries, and are looking for trade union backing.

Children and Mother's Rights

This group formed to combat education cuts. Last year the City Corporation tried to cut primary school hours to half a day without consulting the parents. Thanks to local pressure the scheme has been delayed a year. The group is now looking into educational provisions in the area and their effect on mothers.

Lesbian Feminist Group

This open group for lesbians and anyone interested meets at 8pm on Wednesdays. It also has a small consciousness-raising group.

Useful Contacts

Gingerbread (for one parent families); c/o Drum Chapel Community Centre, Glasgow, phone 334 8326

Citizens Advice Bureau; Bath Street, Glasgow

Shelter: St Vincent Crescent, Glasgow
Scottish Minority Group (Campaign for Homosexual Equality) 534 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. 332 3382.

Family Planning Association: 2 Claremont Terrace, Glasgow

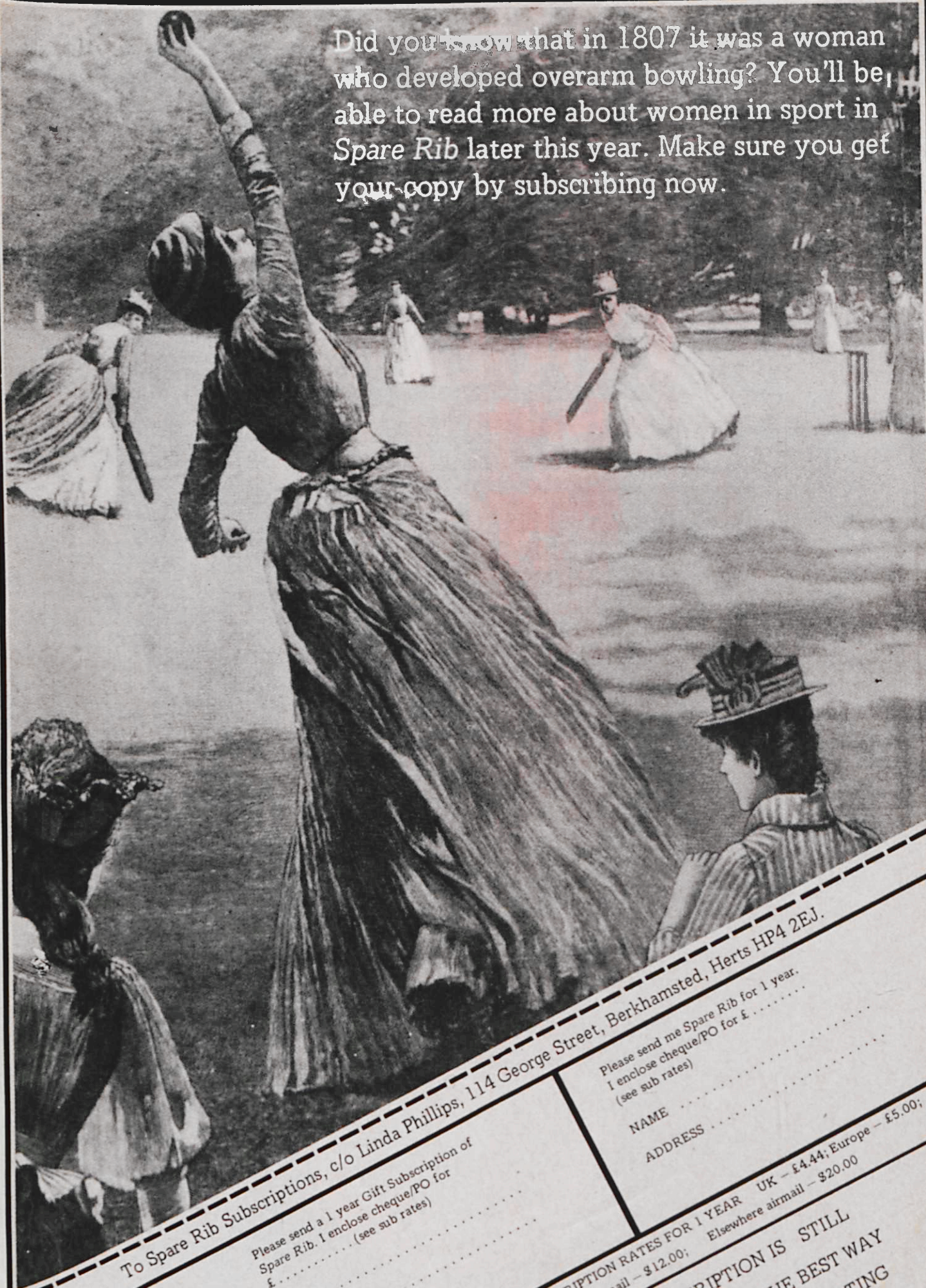
National Childbirth Trust: same address
Scottish Council for Civil Liberties, 214 Clyde Street, Glasgow. Tel 424 0042.

Information for this page was compiled by Glasgow Women's Liberation.

BRIGHTON PAGE ALTERATIONS/CORRECTIONS

Women's Liberation contact address: c/o 5 Lucraft Rd, Brighton. Tel: Brighton 27612. The Women's Centre is open from 10am-1pm on every weekday and on Wednesdays from 6.30-8.30pm, at the Resources Centre, Presbyterian Church Hall, North Rd. Consciousness Raising: Joan Nolan 730927 Women's Study Groups: Annie Munro 686363 Women's Disco. Every 3rd Saturday at the Queen's Head, Steine St. Disco collective meets regularly at the Olive Branch, Sillwood St. All women welcome. Symposium Bookshop is closed for the time being and hasn't yet moved to Gardiner St.

Did you know that in 1807 it was a woman who developed overarm bowling? You'll be able to read more about women in sport in *Spare Rib* later this year. Make sure you get your copy by subscribing now.



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